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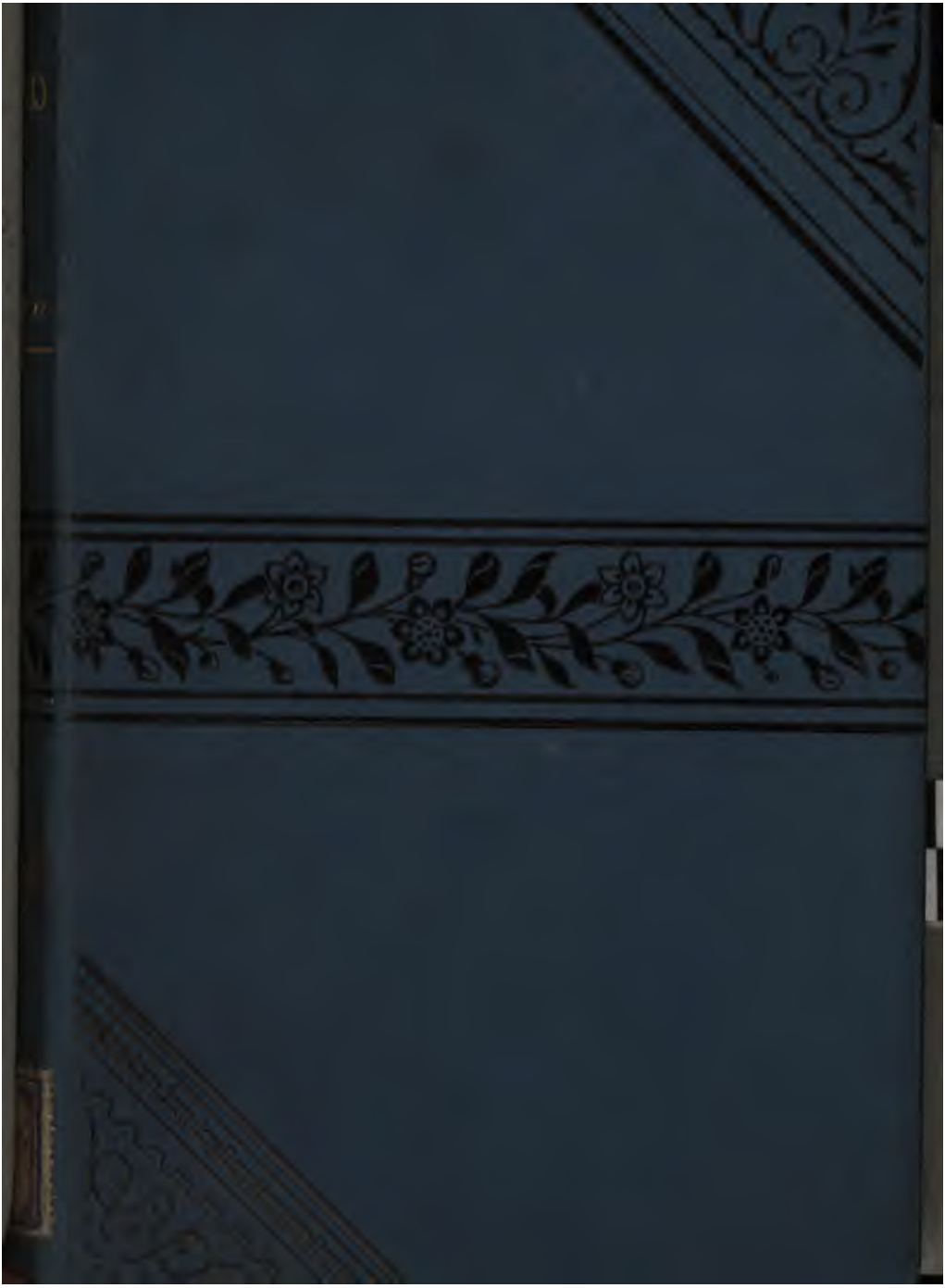


BELOVED OF THE GODS

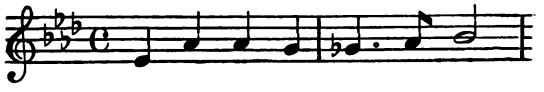
(AFTER THE DANISH).

BY

MRS. OSCAR BERINGER.

LOVE MOTIVE.

Tristan and Isolde. RICHARD WAGNER.



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BELOVED OF THE GODS.

ERRATUM.

Page 192, line 4, *for* "heart" *read* "breast."

some three-and-twenty, and as he half sat, half leaned out of the old-fashioned casement, was perhaps not entirely unconscious of being the magnet for some half-dozen pairs of neighbouring feminine eyes. His meditations were suddenly interrupted by hoarse shouts of "Stop them! Stop them!"

BELOVED OF THE GODS.

CHAPTER I.

One fine October morning in the year of Our Lord 1830, a young law student, Hubert Brédal by name, leant, smoking a philosophic pipe, out of one of the top windows of a friendly looking house at the corner of the Philosopher's Allée, Copenhagen.

He was a tall, well-knit young fellow of some three-and-twenty, and as he half sat, half leaned out of the old-fashioned casement, was perhaps not entirely unconscious of being the magnet for some half-dozen pairs of neighbouring feminine eyes. His meditations were suddenly interrupted by hoarse shouts of "Stop them! Stop them!"

from the next Allée. Hastily snatching up his cap, he started at full speed for the scene of action. There he found a pair of terrified horses, driverless, dashing a brougham from one side of the street to the other, and threatening every instant to lurch it over into the deep canal which runs between the Philosopher's Walk and the street.

A shouting crowd followed, but although an old man appeared at the carriage window imploring for help, no one had the courage to stop the horses.

Without an instant's hesitation, Brédal threw himself at the horse on the near side, and succeeded in getting a firm grip of the reins. He had almost brought them to a standstill when he was struck violently on the breast, and flung to the edge of the canal, where he lay unconscious.

When the horses became more manageable, everybody crowded round. A hundred helping hands were eager to hold their heads,

and as many more tongues vociferously claimed the credit of saving the old man's life. If the owner of the carriage had not himself witnessed Brédal's fate, it is more than probable that he would have lain forgotten at the edge of the canal. He had him gently lifted into the carriage, and by inquiring in one of the neighbouring shops ascertained his address. They then drove quickly to his rooms, where they laid him on his bed. A doctor was at once sent for, who pronounced him to be suffering from dislocation of the shoulder, and general shock to the system. He impressed the necessity for absolute quiet and great care on Brédal's motherly old landlady, Mrs. Bunkeflod.

Some ten days later, Carl Goldberg, a student chum of Brédal's, sat at his bedside reading aloud to him. There was a splendid bunch of hot-house grapes on the table, and the fire burnt cheerily.

Brédal raised himself up in bed, and

looked round the room. When his eyes fell upon the grapes, he said—

"I see supplies have arrived from home. How are they all?"

Goldberg then told him that the grapes, as well as several other luxuries, had been sent to him by the old Baron von Breitenburg.

"And he couldn't well have done less," added Goldberg, "considering you saved him two splendid horses and an English-built carriage; not to mention his life, at the imminent risk of your own. Hullo, Brédal, you're not listening to a word!"

"I heard it all. Did they give Masaniello that night? Get the papers, and read me what has been played since I have been ill?"

"What under Heaven can that matter to you? I believe you are possessed of a theatrical devil. What does it all mean? What is the matter with you?"

"I can't tell you how odd I feel just now," said Brédal after a pause. "The first time

one is allowed to speak after nearly a fortnight's silence one's thoughts seem to pour out in a burning stream which threatens to burst the flood-gates one tries to dam it up with. I feel as if I *must* unburthen myself to someone. Don't be afraid of my overtiring myself. It would be a much greater exertion to me to be silent."

He sank back again on his pillow, and closed his eyes. A burning red flush rose over his face and neck, and his lips trembled visibly. At last Goldberg cried—

"What the devil are you making such a fuss about? Let me loosen your tongue. You're in love again!"

Brédal nodded.

"Well, out with it. Is she a dancer or a singer?"

Brédal shook his head.

"Far from that," he said.

Goldberg jumped up from his chair.

"Far from it!" he cried. "Then we

have got the devil by the tail this time, and no mistake. It must be one of the Princesses at least."

Brédal remained silent.

"So I've guessed right. 'Pon my soul, Brédal, I thought you had been cured of that tomfoolery. Lord knows there are enough women in the world without selecting the inaccessible ones. But that is one of your old weaknesses. When you were in Munich you could find a no less exalted object to adore than the Princess de Wittenberg."

"Ah, that sweet little Lena!" half sighed Brédal.

"There you are again. A roturier like you—one of the canaille—(to use Holberg's classical expression) to dare even to think of a Serene Highness by her Christian name!"

"How I wish the man who first instituted this cursed class system to the devil!" suddenly broke out Brédal, and sat bolt upright. "As long as I was in a foreign country,

amongst strangers, my manner and address passed me. I was accepted on my own merits. I ran my head up against no dead walls of class distinctions. But here, in my own country, amongst my own people, I am damned without a hearing because I don't happen to possess a title."

"Look you, Brédal," said Goldberg, with a mock serious face, "it will certainly come to this some day—you will conceive a 'grande passion' for an Empress, and become a hopeless idiot because you can't make her Madame Brédal. I can't reconcile these attacks with your amount of pride, which, Lord knows, is pretty considerable.

"Don't misunderstand me," said Brédal. "I am the last person in the world to look upon rank as implying perfection. I should like to be the first aristocrat in the land only for the simple reason that I should then have to look up to no one. At the same time, however, I must acknowledge that, for me,

an aristocratic woman has a certain undefinable charm that women of the bourgeoisie do not possess. Her position raises her above all the petty, sordid cares of everyday life. Her mind can remain free from the paralysing and cramping influences of adversity and anxiety. I cannot imagine a goddess without the surroundings of one; yet I detest sham glitter, and a Princess lacking in refinement and charm would be to me the most uninteresting of women."

The two friends were silent for a long time. Goldberg walked up and down the room. Brédal gazed absently before him, and played with the tassels of his quilt. At last he said—

"Goldberg, come and sit beside me here on the bed, and I will tell you something."

"So at last you are going to confess. Well, out with it!"

"Last August, as you know, I went to visit a relation at Kiel, and—"

"And I stayed at home," interrupted

Goldberg, "instead of accompanying you as a sort of cooling draught."

"I will not be interrupted! I came back in the steamer *Caledonia*. We were pretty full, and almost all the passengers remained on deck. As I walked up and down my attention was attracted to a lady who sat gazing out to sea. Her figure was completely hidden by a large travelling cloak, and a broad, drooping hat overshadowed the pale, oval face. She had not moved from her seat for three hours, nor had I heard her voice. I did not lose patience, however, and was leaning over the side of the steamer staring into the waves, when a man whom I had known in Kiel tapped me on the shoulder and asked me whether I could see the portrait of the Princess de Wittenberg in the water. My neighbour raised her eyes, and I looked so stupidly confused that it gave my Kiel friend time to say, 'Ah, you may well look guilty. I heard all about your haunting her at the

balls last winter from Samarow.' Then he left me. I glanced at the lady," continued Brédal, "and I imagined she looked displeased. I moved away, but remained where I could see all the movements of the travelling cloak. At last its owner commenced a conversation with an old lady who sat beside her. I could not help coming sufficiently near to hear her voice. It was clear and sympathetic. She spoke in German, with just sufficient foreign accent to betray that it was not her mother tongue. You know how it is in travelling. Some little service I rendered the lady she spoke with broke the ice, and we were soon all chatting together like old acquaintances. She had been travelling a great deal, and had lately visited Munich. I soon found out, although she had too much tact to impress the fact on me, that she was an intimate friend of the Princess de Wittenberg, and shared my admiration for her. Shortly after, a tall, distinguished looking

man, slightly grizzled, of about forty, came up from the cabin. He looked somewhat superciliously round as he said in French to my companion, 'How do you feel now, Sara? I can't say I am very brilliant.' And he beat a precipitous retreat down the cabin stairs without waiting for an answer. My fair neighbour soon after moved away, and my Kiel friend told me that she was the widow of a Spanish Count, who had been accommodating enough to have a fit of apoplexy a couple of hours after the wedding, and to depart this life leaving her the sole inheritress of an enormous fortune.

"Towards evening the wind rose, and it became very stormy. The tide was against us too. As it grew dark, one passenger after the other disappeared until the Countess, I, and an old gentleman were the only people left on deck. The Captain begged her to go downstairs, but she refused. Towards one o'clock we sighted Laaland. All

at once the steamer struck sharply on a rock. The engines stopped, and a number of terrified passengers, half asleep, crowded up on deck. I at first felt fear, but it was only momentary, and then, almost unconsciously thrusting everyone between us aside, I reached the Countess. She was standing up. One hand covered her eyes; the other tightly grasped the iron railing in front. I felt that she expected every moment to be launched into eternity. I unclasped her hand from the cold iron and tried to reassure her.

"'I will save you,' I whispered. 'I can swim well, and we are not far from land. I will save you.'

"She seemed incapable of uttering a syllable. I kept her hand in mine. I could feel every beat of her pulse through the soft glove that covered it. She almost sank back on the seat. I tried to hold her up, and passed my arm round her waist. She leaned

entirely on me. Her face almost touched mine. I felt her warm breath on my cheek. Her heart beat against mine. God knows how I resisted the temptation of kissing her. I pressed her closely to me, and again whispered—

"'I will save you or die with you.'

"So we remained for several moments while all were screaming and swearing round us.

"The captain's voice suddenly rang out, 'All right.' The steamer righted herself and continued her course. The Countess opened her eyes; I released her hand. I would rather have been fighting the waves with her at that moment than have been obliged to confess to the anti-climax of a false alarm.

"I spent the rest of the night on deck in feverish unrest. At the break of early dawn the usual life awoke again. The sun rose, and a warm, brilliant day dispersed all the mists and gloom of the previous night.

The Countess did not appear again until we reached Copenhagen. She was extremely pale, and looked very languid. She passed me without raising her lovely dark eyes. I ran to the ladder to see her once more. Just as she was stepping into the boat she stood still and said in French—

"'I do not know how to thank you for all your kindness.'

"Her voice trembled. I could not utter a word. I cannot recall whether I even bowed in answer. I can only remember looking deep, deep into her eyes. Her brother now called from the boat—

"'Eh bien, Sara! On vous attend.'

"She descended the ladder, and left me with the unalterable conviction that a few moments under exceptional circumstances had been sufficient to give birth to a passion which would only cease with my life."

"Oh, of course," said Goldberg. "Under the circumstances, you could hardly offer her less than a life's devotion!"

Brédal continued: "Since then I have only seen her in the park, or at the opera. She has always the same box. I ensconce myself in the darkest corner of the pit, and feast my eyes upon her like a vampire—sucking her picture into my soul. When the god of dreams is merciful to me, I am again on board the *Caledonia*, I hold her once more in my arms, and I press her so close to me that I feel, as I did then, her heart beating against mine, and her breath fanning my cheeks. All that I desire is to see her. That provides me with food for my dreams. But if I am unfortunate for a long time, even these are denied to me, and my whole existence becomes a mere vegetation."

Brédal sank back exhausted and shut his eyes. Goldberg was silent, and looked very serious. He felt that expostulation and reproaches would be alike wasted, and yet the temptation to indulge in both was very strong. So there he was sitting, looking the very picture of silent despair when Mrs.

Bunkeflod brought in the tea-tray. The good old woman was quite terrified by his gloomy face, and he had some trouble in convincing her that Brédal had not had a relapse.

"That would be a dreadful misfortune for me," she said, "and God knows how I have prayed that he might live to see his twenty-fourth birthday, which will be to-morrow. Now you're sure there is nothing gone wrong to-night? I fancy he looks a little better."

She then poured out the tea, and as she gave Brédal his he took her hand and said—

"So you haven't forgotten my birthday, dear Mrs. Bunkeflod, in all the trouble and worry this tiresome illness of mine has given you. You are really too good to me."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Bunkeflod, with tears in her eyes. "I haven't forgotten that to-morrow is my dear Mr. Hubert's birthday. Mr. Goldberg must come, and see what kind of a present I have got for my birthday child. When you leave, Mr. Goldberg, be sure to

knock at my door on your way down that I may have my ears ready if Mr. Hubert should call."

Brédal tried in vain to persuade the kind old woman not to sit up. She was much too afraid that something might happen in the night to prevent her celebration of his twenty-fourth birthday.

"Let her alone," said Goldberg. "She is already enjoying the effect of the grand cake she has baked for you, with your name in gorgeous sugar letters on the top."

CHAPTER II.

When Goldberg came the next afternoon he found a very smart carriage at the door, and Mrs. Bunkeflod in the greatest excitement on the stairs.

"Be as quiet as you can, Mr. Goldberg, please, and be so kind as to step into my room for a few minutes. The German Ambassador himself has come to congratulate Mr. Brédal on his birthday, and has been upstairs for nearly an hour. He came in a grand coach with two footmen behind. Ah! this *is* a birthday for Mr. Hubert to remember to the end of his life. If I only knew whether it would be right to take in chocolate to such a grand gentleman! What do you think, Mr. Goldberg?"

Before Goldberg could answer, Brédal's door opened, and the old Baron von Breitenburg came down the stairs.

Mrs. Bunkeflod curtsied to the ground, and said—

"Good afternoon, your Excellency, good afternoon," and bowed him right out to the door, while some of the other lodgers, with less *savoir faire*, simply stared with their mouths open.

Goldberg went up and found Brédal lying back exhausted by the long visit. Goldberg took a book and sat down on the sofa.

At last Brédal broke the silence.

"To-day is the last of my twenty-fourth year, and I shall probably commence my twenty-fifth under totally different circumstances."

"I congratulate you," laughed Goldberg, "and beg to offer my plebeian good wishes, in the hope that your aristocratic visitor has not spoilt you for common folks."

"It is just this visitor who has given me so much to think about," said Brédal. "The old man was kindness personified, and in

offering me the post of private secretary to himself, made the offer as if it were a favour that I was conferring upon him, instead of the reverse. I have made up my mind to accept it, although of course the position is a subordinate one."

"Subordinate be hanged!" cried Goldberg. "The King in future will be your 'gracious master,' as the diplomats say, but for all that there is a great deal of difference between the secretary to the German Legation and an insignificant student."

"Nonsense," said Brédal. "The post is an entirely private one, and not half such an advance as you make out."

"Not an advance? But that's always the way with your lucky people. They are utterly spoilt, and look upon all good fortune as merely their deserts—not to speak of all the baronesses and countesses you will be able to cultivate. You are a veritable 'Hans in luck.'"

"Yes, a 'Hans in luck,' upon whose heels misfortune is always treading," said Brédal, with a smile which somewhat belied his words.

"Well, that is good!" cried Goldberg. "You were half killed, recover, and are rewarded by a splendid appointment, and still you are discontented. Such black ingratitude deserves the most condign punishment, and instead, you get—chocolate. Come in, Mrs. Bunkeflod, with all your good things."

Mrs. Bunkeflod trotted into the room with an alacrity which showed how impatiently she had awaited the summons. She placed the tray before Brédal so that a covered cup stood directly before him.

"Well, make haste," said Goldberg. "Give me your cup that I may pour out your chocolate."

Brédal raised the cover, but very nearly dropped it as he saw that the cup was full of new gold pieces. Goldberg examined the

tray, and found it lined with bank notes. Brédal stared amazed at the money. Goldberg cried—

"Are you out of your mind, Mrs. Bunkeflod? Who does the money belong to?"

But Mrs. Bunkeflod was rocking herself on the sofa, and seemed incapable of uttering a word. At last she said—

"It is Mr. Brédal's money, and it is all real—just out of the bank. It was on the morning that the Ambassador ran over Mr. Brédal that it all came into my head. I began to think 'Now how can we get him decently buried, for he has only got a couple of thalers in the world, and they won't get him a decent funeral.' So I took them out of his purse, and thought to myself well, Mr. Brèdal has always had good luck, so I will take the numbers of his age, twenty-four, and—"

"And that came out in the lottery," cried Goldberg, who was busy counting the money.

"Yes. And oh! how afraid I was that he

would die before I could tell him, for the doctor expressly forbade me to excite him in any way. I'm sure many's the time it has almost come over my lips, and I've had to run out of the room for fear of telling it."

Brédal had lain quite still listening. When Mrs. Bunkeflod stopped, he put his hand in hers, saying—

"I can't take all this money; at least, half belongs to you, dear Mrs. Bunkeflod. You must share it with me."

"Not a farthing shall I touch!" cried Mrs. Bunkeflod. "But you must dream of a lucky number for me."

Brédal smiled, and said—

"Well, I will take it for us both."

"Yes," said Goldberg, "Mrs. Bunkeflod is right. The money is honestly yours. 2,651 thalers. Long live the lottery and Mrs. Bunkeflod!"

And in his joy he was going to kiss her when over went the chocolate tray. What

remained was soon disposed of, and then off trotted good Mrs. Bunkeflod to disclose her wonderful news to the neighbours, who were most impressed by her having been able to keep the secret so long.

"You must at last acknowledge, Brédal," said Goldberg, after counting the money for the hundredth time, "that you were born under a lucky star. Or are you so confoundedly conceited as to imagine that you are only receiving your just dues in becoming a member of the Diplomatic service and a millionaire on the same day?"

"What does Solon say?" replied Brédal. "'Call no man happy until he is in his grave.' Yes, I am lucky, but—happiness! One wants more than an appointment or a prize in the lottery for that. God only knows whether I shall ever be happy in my life."

"Oh Lord, how tiresome you are once you commence that confounded moralizing!" cried Goldberg. "You've got money enough to buy a Court suit, and the opportunity of

making love to as many princesses and countesses as you please. What in the name of all that's reasonable do you want more? One thing you must do—look out for a better lodging than Mrs. Bunkeflod's."

"And that is the one thing I never will do," cried Brédal. "My good luck came to me at Mrs. Bunkeflod's, and with Mrs. Bunkeflod I remain."

"Oh well, do as you like. Whatever you do is sure to turn out lucky."

After a long silence Brédal cried—

"Goldberg, I *will* believe in my good fortune! Henceforward I will press bravely on in the battle of life, and my war cry shall be 'Spain and Happiness!'"

"Germany you mean—if the Baron acts up to his promises."

"No," said Brédal. "The letter 'S' is engraved on my heart. It stands for Spain, Seville, and yet another name too sacred to be mentioned here."

CHAPTER III.

MANY of our readers in Copenhagen will remember to have seen the Baron von Breitenburg taking his daily constitutional on the Esplanade on the side nearest the Ostergate.

Differing in many other respects from the rest of his tribe, so did he also in his choice of walks, and but seldom appeared in the fashionable promenade. He had been intimate in his youth with many of the most intellectual men of his time, and, as a consequence, had developed a many sidedness of nature and character very seldom to be met with amongst his *confrères*. He had always lived in and belonged to the world in the broadest sense of the term. Yet even his vices were invariably toned down by innate amiability and good taste. He was now an old man, a consummate diplomat, and ex-

cellent statician. His life also bore a certain idyllic stamp, and when, in summer, he sat working in his garden surrounded by birds and flowers, and in winter in his study, which was more like a conservatory, where casts from the antique and pictures peeped between orange trees and heliotrope, no one would have imagined that this man was at work on a treaty which would serve as a future model to the whole Corps Diplomatique.

Brédal felt a thorough 'outsider' as he sat beside the Baron on their way to a reception at the French Embassy. He was in a suppressed fever between wishing that the Countess might be at the reception, and hoping that she had already started for St. Petersburg.

The lights danced before his eyes as they entered the hall, and it required a firm effort to preserve an outer semblance of unconcern.

By the time they had reached the reception room he had recovered sufficient self-control

to avoid any outward appearance of embarrassment.

Baron von Breitenburg entered the room with all the dignity born of a consciousness that his Royal master was at that moment represented in his own person.

Before the open fireplace stood Marechal d'Aubigny, the French Ambassador, in conversation with two gentlemen. He advanced three steps to meet the new comers, then stood still and shook hands with Baron von Breitenburg. The Baron introduced his secretary. The Ambassador bowed, and without a word waved his hand towards the adjoining room, from whence a perfect Babel of tongues issued. He then commenced speaking to the Baron, and left Brédal to his fate. He was too much afraid of meeting the Countess to venture into the room indicated, so he fell back a few steps, remaining as near the group as he could with decency.

The Ambassador, rather an ordinary looking man, of middle stature, with a red ribbon

in his button hole and star on his breast, spoke with great animation and gesticulated without ceasing. He once more advanced three steps to meet the Prussian Ambassador, and receded two to receive the salutations of the secretary, Baron Lessing, a tall, spare man with strongly-marked features and dark eyes, which contrasted strangely with his fair hair. He had the reputation of being the only person who dared to differ with the haughty Marechal d'Aubigny. The marked coldness with which he was received went far to confirm the report.

Two young men were leaning against the doors between the two rooms, and criticising the new arrivals.

One, Samarow by name, said, laughing—

"Look at that old man who has just come in! I'll bet you ten to one he is a Dane."

The new-comer was certainly not of an imposing presence. His gait was shuffling and undecided, albeit amiability and intelligence beamed from his eyes.

"That is a Danish Cabinet Minister," answered the other.

"Can it be possible to look more ridiculous?" said Samarow, whom Brédal remembered to have met in Munich.

"One can see at once that he is a native."

Brédal's patriotism flared up at this, and without an instant's hesitation he stepped backwards, treading heavily on Samarow's feet. He then faced round, looked at him contemptuously from head to foot, and, as if he had only needed this defiance of the *convenances* to bring up his courage to the sticking point, walked boldly into the next room.

His fears had been groundless. The Countess was not there.

As he drove away with the Baron and mentally reviewed his experiences, he came to the comfortable conclusion that he had been bored to death, and had probably made an enemy for life.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning when Brédal and Baron von Breitenburg were discussing the previous evening's entertainment, he acknowledged to the Baron with all the frankness that was one of his greatest charms that he had felt horribly bored.

"My dear fellow," said the Baron, "I can see that you expected to find a reception with us an amusement—a relaxation after labour. But you were wrong. We of the Corps Diplomatique live in simultaneous rest and labour. You are now entering a new world, and I should like to give you a few hints which you can either act upon or not, as seems most prudent to you."

Brédal assured the Baron of his interest in the subject, and after lighting a cigar the old man resumed—

"You were bored yesterday, and you will be bored again—numberless times. So that the thing is to learn how to be bored with a good grace. This is an indispensable accomplishment to cultivate if you want to succeed in the world. A person who can be bored agreeably will never run up against difficulties, and may, once and for all, scratch the word out of his dictionary. Never speak of yourself. This is at once a violation of all the rules of politeness and *bête!* Make the people with whom you are talking the subject of conversation is one of those golden rules one can never take sufficiently to heart. It pays, my friend, and when one is absent earns praise from all sides. This is what a Frenchman most happily termed *la science du monde.* The 'science' alone, however, is just as incapable of making us 'somebodies' as are fine clothes. Without it one is as helpless as one would be in a ragged coat. The world inhabited by the 'upper

ten' totally differs from that of ordinary middle class life. You must succeed after an absolutely different fashion in each. One of your countrymen once said to me, 'In Denmark, as elsewhere, one requires a great deal of recommendation to succeed.' These 'recommendations' come, as a rule, from women. To obtain them, avoid general flirtation. Devote yourself to a woman who has passed her first youth. Elderly ladies are our most secure support. They are our best 'informers.' They know all the back ways. They trumpet forth our praises, and draw the attention of the world to all those virtues we are either too modest, or too politic to proclaim. Young women are generally vain and selfish. They imagine that all wounds can be healed by a smile, or, if the case be very serious, by the pressure of a hand. They will give you your *congé* with the most graceful indifference, and you may consider yourself lucky if you are not

required to give your successor a leg up. If you wish for the acquaintance of less desirable ladies, I should advise you to choose the most *risquèe*. They will love you without knowing why, and will drop you for the same excellent reason. You will run but little risk of burning your fingers in this quarter. Then come the platonic variety—who are generally full of sentiment. They will make a feint of surrender to retain you as a conquest, and ought to be labelled as the 'most dangerous of their species.' Never dream of constancy or truth. If you put a bullet through your head, a few tears would probably be shed over you, but it would be necessary to go to the next ball—'*car il faut cacher cette affaire.*'"

Brédal gazed gloomily down. These precepts were in direct and dire opposition to the dearest wishes of his heart. Yet his judgment told him that the old man of the world was right.

The Baron saw that some struggle was going on within and was silent.

A few minutes later the English Ambassador, Lord Malden, was announced.

Brédal rose at once. He looked round. Everything seemed changed. He seemed to have suddenly entered the Palace of Truth. The charming study, with its statues and flowers, had become an ordinary writing-room.

The Baron, whom he had hitherto looked upon as a sort of higher creation, had dwindled into a mere mortal like himself. All his illusions had vanished, and, as he thought of the Countess Olfers, he could not repress a deep sigh.

The Baron had, however, no intention of leaving him in this frame of mind. Turning to the groom of the chambers, he said—

"Ask his Excellency to excuse me. I am finishing a despatch which must be sent off at once. No—stop, I will tell him myself."

He returned in a few minutes with a beaming face, which contrasted strongly with Brèdal's dejected expression.

"What a blessing despatches are to us of the Corps Diplomatique! They are the same haven for diplomats that our fair friends find in headaches. But what are you looking so solemn about? Oh, I see; you have been *desillusioné* by those last words of mine. Yes; I made just such a face when it was too late for me to recover what I had lost for ever. I stood, as you are now standing, after having been kicked out of the world of imagination into that of fact. Accept the world as it is. What I have just been saying to you was in reference to the flirtations of the *grande monde.* I did not intend in the least to imply that love was unknown therein. I have lived my life, tasted its bitternesses, seen its mistakes, but I am far from being blind to its completeness. I should be guilty of the sheerest ingratitude were I to pretend

not to have enjoyed my full share of earthly happiness."

The Baron walked up and down the room several times, overpowered by the recollections called up by his words.

Brédal rose. The Baron grasped his hand warmly, and they parted without another word.

CHAPTER V.

Our hero continued frequenting the diplomatic circle. He had made the grand round, and had been introduced to everybody worth knowing. The Countess was still in Copenhagen. Her brother had evidently no immediate intention of leaving, for he had taken a large suite of rooms, although they received very little. Brédal met her nowhere.

Contrary to his expectations, Samarow had made advances to him, and recalled their former acquaintance in Munich. He, however, discreetly ignored the occasion when Brédal formed such a poor opinion of his courage, and avoided the whole subject with an airy tact quite worthy of admiration.

Brédal never treated him with more than the chilliest politeness, but, far from being re-

buffed by this, Samarow redoubled his efforts to become intimate, and trumpeted forth Brédal's praises to the world with an enthusiasm which people took for granted could only be based upon intimate friendship. And yet he knew no more of him than that his name was Brédal, that he had studied law in Munich, that M. Samarow had felt afraid of him, and that he was now the secretary and *protegé* of the Austrian Ambassador.

"This M. de Brédal is an extraordinary fellow," he told everybody who would listen to him. "We studied together in Munich. He had the *entrée* at Court there. He has become somewhat melancholy of late, but he is a perfect dare-devil, never tired of fighting and shooting. They say he saved the Ambassador's life by jumping out of the carriage when the horses had bolted. He is a most reckless devil."

People looked at the "reckless devil," and thought he seemed capable of anything. The

fact of his being a crack shot, having had plenty of "experiences," and being generally a smart young fellow, was sufficient to command their respect. Such a person was a *rara avis* amongst diplomats except at the English Legation, where one ran up against similar specimens now and then.

Baron von Breitenburg was amazingly gratified to find his *protegé* so well received and did not guess for a moment that it was mainly due to the *reclâme* made for him by Samarow.

One evening at the English Embassy, Brédal was standing at the door, and had just turned to leave when the Countess Olfers and her brother passed him, followed by the low murmur of admiration a beautiful woman always commands.

"There is the Countess Olfers," said somebody.

"Why is she called Olfers?" asked the old Privy Councillor to the Austrian Legation.

"She was married when she was only fifteen to a Spanish Grandee—Count Joantho," said Baron Lessing. "She was born in Spain when her father was quartered there, and is very much younger than her brother. The mother and father were separated. Old Count Olfers thought his daughter too Spanish and his son too Dutch to get on well together. He took the son with him, and the mother remained in Seville with her daughter. Count Joantho saw her there, and fell in love with her. The mother insisted on her marrying him, but he died in a fit of apoplexy a few hours after the wedding —brought on, people said, by too ardent an appreciation of the charms of his lovely young bride. After her mother's death she resumed her maiden name, why I don't know. She inherited the whole of her husband's enormous fortune. The brother and sister have been travelling together lately, and she will accompany him to St. Petersburg."

"I thought you would be able to tell me all about them," said the Councillor. "I will reward you by giving you a hint with regard to Marechal d'Aubigny which you may use at discretion."

Count Olfers sat down at once to play whist.

The Countess was chatting with some ladies. She was dressed in black Spanish lace and wore a profusion of magnificent diamonds. Her faultless arms and neck never looked more lovely. She was somewhat pale, and her eyes were surrounded by dark rings which made them seem doubly lustrous.

Brédal stood perfectly still looking at her. Her voice at once vividly recalled the night they had spent together on board the steamer. "I have held her in my arms. Her head has rested on my heart. Her lips have almost touched mine." His whole being thrilled with these recollections. At

that moment the Countess raised her eyes. She flushed slightly and half turned away.

Brédal's heart throbbed so painfully that he almost seemed to stop breathing for an instant. With a powerful effort he recovered his self-control, and passed into the next room. He had not, however, sufficient strength of mind to leave altogether.

The Countess's advent had changed the aspect of everything. All symptoms of being bored had totally disappeared, and when, later in the evening, Baron von Breitenburg said to him—

"Are you coming soon? I am going home," he cried—

"Already? Is your Excellency going so soon?"

"Soon!" replied the Baron with the greatest astonishment. "Didn't you see Lady Malden yawning her head off an hour ago? She did not even try to hide it. I could not checkmate, or I should have

been off long ago. Come along, Mr. Satirical!"

Brédal looked round.

The company had nearly all left. The Countess was waiting for her carriage, and seemed deeply interested in some engravings. Lady Malden was leaning back on the sofa with all the ease of an Englishwoman, and yawned each time wider than the last.

Count Olfers walked up and down the room with Lord Malden, looking every minute at his watch as if in excuse for the delay.

Brédal followed his patron in silence, and drove home to his humble dwelling in the Philosopher's Walk.

When he was alone he flung himself down on the sofa, and began to conjure up the most torturing thoughts. "Does she despise me? Why did she turn away so quickly? Why did she flush when she saw me? My God, how lovely she is! And her voice—it

is like one of those Spanish songs in a minor key which almost bring the tears into one's eyes. Has she any conception of how madly I love her? Impossible! How could she, Count Joantho's widow, imagine that I, thrown by a mere caprice amongst this titled throng, should presume to love her? Why did she turn away from me? From sheer annoyance probably that I had dared to hold her in my arms with as much boldness as if I possessed generations of ancestors. They are so proud, these Spaniards. But I will show her I can be as proud as she. I should become the butt of the whole clique if I betrayed myself to these dressed-up dolls who are so conceited of their superficial refinement."

The next morning the storm had somewhat abated. In a book lent him by the Baron he happened to come across the following passage:

"When one is in a subordinate position it

is very difficult to be quite just to those placed higher than ourselves in the world. One is very apt to consider everyone endowed with advantages not possessed by ourselves in the light of an enemy!"

Twelve hours before Brédal would have scouted such an idea, but its justice now struck him with peculiar force.

CHAPTER VI.

In the course of a few months, Brédal had become a thorough man of fashion.

He rode, having been provided with a horse by his generous patron, whose fancy for him had grown into an almost paternal affection.

He dined at the fashionable hour of five at one of the best hotels. At the opera he no longer hid himself in the darkest corner of the pit to gloat over the Countess Olfers. He now went two or three times a week to the best seats, and when his glass swept the house it was not allowed to rest for more than a second on her box, while his heart beat so violently that one could almost see it through his coat.

The only thing he had not changed were his rooms. He still lodged with good Mrs. Bunkeflod in the Philosopher's Walk.

The Baron, although he had done his best to induce him to come and live with him, honoured him for his loyalty to the old woman, who had tended him like a mother in his illness, and had been so staunch and true when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb.

He was now her greatest pride, and every time he received an invitation she never failed to let the neighbours know of it.

"The Ambassador's lackeys are always up and down our stairs. I have had to whiten them twice a week since he has become such a grand gentleman; but Lord, I don't mind the trouble for my dear Mr. Hubert. Ah, that was a lucky day when the Ambassador knocked him into the canal."

"I owe the Olfers a visit," said the Baron one morning to Brédal, who leant over his desk to hide the undiplomatic flush that always rose to his face when he heard the name unexpectedly. "You must come with me. I'll introduce you."

Brédal began to mumble some excuse when the Baron added—

"It is a house that I should like you to frequent if possible. It is absolutely essential to me to find out with whom this Olfers corresponds, and, in fact, why he is staying here. I know he has a *liaison* with the Countess's maid. His figure is, however, too much like mine to hold a very secure place in the affections even of a *femme de chambre*. The girl is exceedingly pretty, and I don't think I am imposing a very disagreeable task on you when I ask you to cultivate her good graces. Have you any practice in this line? Anyhow it is just as well for you to acquire a little experience. Be so good as to enter all the presents to the Legation. You must observe a certain gradation: first a bonnet, then a dress, then a pair of earrings. If you find out nothing after the earrings come to a stop. You will soon understand how to manage the matter. Only—you must

be prompt, for we have no time to lose—three weeks at longest. Ah! I see you are frightened at my ultimatum; but don't be afraid! Three weeks are long enough to conquer a countess, let alone her *femme de chambre!*"

These instructions, which were absolutely revolting to Brédal, were delivered in the most matter-of-fact manner.

"Your Excellency," said Brédal, after a pause, "has always treated me with a kindness and favour that I can never repay. It is doubly disagreeable to me that I lay myself open to the charge of ingratitude and run the risk of displeasing you when I deprecate accepting the commission you have offered me. I should only ruin your plan instead of accomplishing it. It is too much against my every—" He stopped suddenly. The Baron also remained silent. Brédal continued—"Your Excellency was kind enough to impress some precepts on me which will always serve as my guide. You yourself have taught me

that not even a diplomat ought to undertake anything—that he ought to be ashamed of," he added, softly, for he felt in saying this that he was casting a reflection on his patron.

"'That not even a diplomat,'" repeated the Baron, smiling. "My dear fellow, you have given me, personally, very great pleasure by your refusal. But you would have done the Legation a service if you had acceded to my request. Endeavour to remain always as pure as you are at this moment. I say 'endeavour,' for in our position a man is not always his own master. He is sometimes the slave of circumstances which compel him to use means which he himself despises. I *must* have particulars of Olfers' correspondence. It is absolutely essential. *Soit*! I must manage it some other way. My valet is an intelligent fellow. He shall pay his addresses to the girl, and if he goes too far, I will make him marry her. But you must come with me to the Olfers' all the same.

You meet them too often not to know them."

Brédal could not shake off the painful impression the Baron's proposal had made upon him.

"They are all alike," he thought, "when it comes to their own interests. They all hold the doctrine of the end justifying the means. I believe after all he would have been better pleased if I had undertaken the affair. But to propose *to me* what he considers equally suitable for his valet!"

Brédal bit his lip savagely, and no word was spoken until they reached their destination. The Countess was not alone. The wife of the Prussian Ambassador, a very charming woman, her daughter, and several gentlemen were there.

After the Baron had introduced Brédal (whom he called his adopted son) the conversation, which had turned upon the disturbed state of Spain, was resumed.

"But what would become of us Legitimists, if one did not try to stamp out this revolutionary Hydra?" asked one of the gentlemen.

The American Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Stobart, shrugged his shoulders with a half-repressed smile, which was doubly significant on account of the effort made to repress it.

"My poor Fatherland" said the Countess. "I was born, and spent the greater part of my life in Spain. There is no more delightful land in the whole world. My mother dearly loved the country and so do I."

"How can you say so?" returned the Countess von Glehn. "Spain—with all its dirt and its robberies! Even the Court they say is unbearable. I would not live for anything in the world in Madrid, and everybody says the same thing."

"Believe me, one can never depend upon such assertions. When I left Paris to come here with my brother everyone condoled

with me. They told me it was a region of everlasting ice and snow, that the sun was invisible for half the year, and thousands of other such absurdities. It was positively believed in Paris that it was the custom at Danish funerals to sit round the corpse eating and drinking. Marechal d'Aubigny had done it himself when a Danish minister was buried. And yet, you see, we all live here quite comfortably, and it is just the same case at Madrid."

They laughed, but were all unanimous that Copenhagen was a sort of social Siberia for cultivated people.

The Countess Olfers defended Denmark, partly, she said, because it was absent, and partly because the accusation was really unjust.

Baron von Breitenburg turned the conversation, which he feared might be distasteful to Brédal, and spoke again of Spain.

"Do not condemn a nation," cried the

Countess Olfers, "merely because she tries to free her neck from a galling yoke after a series of years of the most shameful misgovernment. One must have lived in the country to be able to form any conception of this. I thank God I am no diplomat, and am not therefore obliged to repress my sympathy with the oppressed, or to weigh my opinions in any political scale. I acknowledge quite openly that if any wish of mine could affect Spain's freedom, the struggle would very soon be at an end."

"You are a fanatic," said the Countess von Glehn, "and it is decidedly becoming to you."

"It is a family weakness," answered the Countess Olfers. "My grandfather was murdered in Madrid for opposing the tyranny of those in power. I have not been brought up to look on at injustice with philosophy. The abuse of power is revolting to me. I have a great deal too much Liberal blood in my veins to be able to endure it."

Brédal's eyes were rivetted on the Countess. The warmth with which she spoke was infectious, and when she afterwards said, "I know of nothing so ennobling as the hope of being free," he added with considerable fervour, "Yet there is something more glorious still—to throw off one's chains, and regain one's liberty."

Baron von Breitenburg shook his head, and seemed rather annoyed.

The Countess looked at Brédal for the first time, and gave him a bewilderingly sweet smile.

Count Olfers' entrance now monopolized general attention, and the subject dropped. One by one the company took leave.

Baron von Breitenburg and Brédal had also risen to go when Olfers whispered a few words to the Baron, and they both disappeared.

A little time before, Brédal would have considered himself in a seventh heaven to be

able to spend a few minutes alone with the Countess. Now—he wished himself at the Antipodes.

She sat down again, and with a suspicion of hauteur in her voice said—

"I presume my brother has some clause in a treaty to discuss with the Baron, and will soon return. Pray sit down. You have travelled much, M.—M. de Brédal?"

He answered dryly—

"I studied law in Munich, and returned last autumn in the steamer *Caledonia.*"

An almost imperceptible shade passed over the Countess's face as she answered.

"Returned? Oh, then you are not for the first time in Denmark?"

And as she spoke she glanced at the door as if devoutly hoping for speedy deliverance from this *tête-à-tête.*

"I am behaving like a dolt," thought Brédal. He already regretted having spoken so brusquely.

With as much cordiality as he could infuse into his voice he said—

"I am a Dane, and must thank your ladyship for your kind defence of my fatherland."

"What?" cried the Countess. "You are a Dane, and an Austrian diplomat? I should never have credited Metternich with such an imprudence as placing a young Dane at the Legation in Copenhagen. I very much doubt whether Denmark would accept an Austrian at Vienna."

"But I must remind you," said Brédal, "that I have not the honour of being an Austrian diplomat. In reality I am no diplomat at all. You have taught me to-day that I ought to thank God that I am not in a position to sell my conscience to either party. I work under the Austrian Ambassador—if the very trifling duties I undertake can be dignified by the name of work."

This last acknowledgment cost Brédal a

severe pang. The subordination of his position had never before struck him so painfully.

The Countess seemed unconscious of his embarrassment. She spoke of Spain, compared it with Denmark, which, now that she was alone with him she attacked, to give him an opportunity of defence. She spoke of her childhood, of Seville, of Spanish music, of a convent where she had spent some time during her mother's absence in France, when, at last, the door opened and the two diplomats entered.

They plainly showed their surprise at finding Brédal still there, while he was perfectly dumbfoundered to see, on glancing at the clock, that two hours had flown by.

The Countess made some remark about their long absence, but quickly added that the Baron's secretary had made her better acquainted with Denmark in half-an-hour than she had become during her six months' stay in Copenhagen.

Brédal took leave more infatuated than ever.

The Baron, on the contrary, was in a very bad humour—whether in consequence of his inability to pump the wary Olfers, or from an attack of that weakness so common amongst patrons—disgust at his *protegé* showing signs of independence—did not appear.

He lectured Brédal during the whole of the drive home on the impolicy of being led away by enthusiasm, that arch enemy of diplomacy; the imprudence of declaring one's self against the powers "that be," and the blunder of remaining two hours and a half at a first visit.

Brédal had closed his eyes, and did not hear a word. While the Baron imagined him totally crushed by this powerful exposition of his crimes, he was thinking how infinitely more charming the Countess had looked in her morning dress than the evening before—although it unfortunately possessed the disadvantage of hiding her lovely arms and neck!

CHAPTER VII.

After Brédal's introduction to the Countess he was always longing for night, that he might go out and meet her somewhere. Society began to have the fascination for him that high play possesses for a gambler. He would not allow himself to realize that the stakes meant life or death to him. He was content when he could see her, listen to her voice, or exchange a few indifferent words with her.

"That woman," said Baron Lessing one evening, "is a most extraordinary mixture of frivolity and earnestness. When one sees her with children, she is just like one of them herself—as unrestrained and full of nonsense. In society, she almost gives one the idea of being a thorough-paced coquette, although I am certain there is not a trace of real

coquetry in her character. She is so impressionable as to almost frighten me at times if I did not know how much real depth and sincerity she possesses. She is a most charming woman!"

Brédal felt a sharp pang of jealousy, and as he glanced at the speaker, could not help acknowledging in him no mean rival.

"Why doesn't she marry?" asked a man called Delteff, as he surveyed a rather handsome but uninteresting face in the glass.

"She doesn't intend to," said Lessing. "Everybody knows that. She finds it more amusing to remain a young widow of twenty. I don't think her heart gives her much trouble. That is the only thing I have against her—she is so confoundedly cold."

"She could be a princess any day," said Samarow, who came up at this moment. "You are speaking of the Olfers'? Prince Porzio has gone quite mad about her. Haven't you seen him to-night? He is in

the third room, playing the inamorato to perfection."

They all laughed.

Brédal soon after found himself in the room indicated.

The Countess was sitting back in a low chair playing with her fan, and the Prince was leaning over her. He chattered without ceasing, but she seemed very *distraite*, and paid him but little attention.

Prince Porzio was an Italian, and a true diplomat in appearance—he was a thorough-going fraud. Tall and commanding in figure, he seemed a Hercules—while his actual strength was almost *nil*. He looked a well-preserved old man of fifty, and he was a badly-preserved young man of twenty-five. One naturally expected this giant to have a deep bass voice, but the Prince, on the contrary, squeaked in a most minute falsetto. He possessed a nose of great character and determination, and a

pair of ferret-like eyes—yet he was a man of vacillating character, and but small intelligence.

"But he is a prince," thought Brédal, "and one is never quite deaf to a prince's soft nothings."

"Good heavens, your Highness, how you exaggerate!" cried the Countess suddenly. "You really treat my geographical knowledge with too little respect. I can prove to you at once that you are wrong." She then turned to Brédal and said, "M. de Brédal, will you have the goodness to decide a difference of opinion? The Prince has just been telling me that there is a snow mountain, almost as high as Mont Blanc, in one of your provinces, and that it is called 'Cap Scague.' M. de Brédal is a Dane," she added, giving a sort of wave of her hand which might be called an introduction.

The Prince gave Brédal a questioning glance as he bowed slightly.

The Countess looked up at him with a smile, which at once put to flight any diffidence he may at first have felt.

He drew nearer to the Countess's chair, and ignoring the Prince, explained that Cap Scague, far from being a snow mountain, was in reality a flat desert of sand. The Prince looked sulky. Brédal's triumph was but short-lived, however, for there soon commenced that chatter about nothings, which was an accomplishment Brédal had not become sufficiently "initiated" to have acquired.

"How they can talk for a couple of hours about nothing at all I cannot imagine," he thought as he savagely gnawed his moustache. "There's that ass of an Italian accompanying his own stupidity with an obligato of squeaking, and yet I heartily envy him."

This was, however, one of his red-letter nights, and he went home much happier than usual.

* * * * * *

Some amateur theatricals, which were to be given at one of the Royal Prince's houses, were now causing a great deal of excitement. The whole fashionable world of Copenhagen was intensely interested in the matter and took it up *con amore.*

The cast was already decided upon, and the costumes were a constant subject of discussion. Old engravings were consulted, and grand councils held.

The Countess played two of the leading *rôles.*

Brédal managed to procure an admission to the last dress rehearsal, to which the children, governesses, and tutors attached to the Prince's household were invited. He had expected to find the semi-darkness of a theatre rehearsal, but the saloon was brilliantly lighted. He succeeded at last in getting a seat near the stage, where he was somewhat in the shadow of the footlights. The curtain rose. The Countess came on at

once. She was really charming as a peasant girl, and played naturally and with much animation.

Tea was served between the first and second pieces. The curtain was left up, and several of the children left their seats to look at the footlights, and to peer with childish curiosity at the scenery. The Countess knelt down and leaned over the footlights to speak to them. They soon formed a complete circle round her. She leant down to kiss a little girl. The child knocked against one of the footlights, which fell and smashed to atoms on the ground.

The Countess sprang up, the child screamed with all its might. Brédal could not repress an exclamation, and it rushed to him. There he sat in the full blaze of the lamps with the child on his lap, wishing the little screamer miles away.

The Countess looked at him wonderingly.

"*You* here? Are you going to be so very hard on us that you come twice?"

Brédal did not answer.

"Well, how did I get on? Were you satisfied with me?" asked the Countess with all her accustomed vivacity. "I delight in hearing a candid opinion. At the same time, you mustn't be too hard on me, for I have studied quite alone."

Before Brédal could answer she was called away to dress for the next piece. It was a little *piéce de salon* of Scribe's. She took the leading part, and acted most delightfully.

These lines occurred in her part:

"There are moments in our existence when the silence of a few seconds is far, far more expressive than the words of a lifetime."

This was addressed to Samarow, who was acting with her, but she spoke the whole sentence directly at Brédal.

This was the only time that her eyes looked over the footlights.

The air of the saloon seemed all at once stifling to Brédal. He left the Palace, and hurried down to the quay. The dark ocean lay before him as impenetrable as his future. It was blowing hard. He took off his hat to cool his burning forehead in the wind. The pieces of ice between the ships were set in motion by the waves, and the noise lulled his senses to slumber. Round him all was still. It was already late, the few remaining lamps burnt dimly. Where he stood all was gloomy, but he was not conscious of it—in his soul was light.

The Countess's message had given birth to a hope which shed a greater brilliance around than all the castle illuminations put together.

"For me!" he thought exultantly. "Those words were for me alone. Yes—there *has* been a moment in our existence when

silence was a thousand times more eloquent than speech. Prince as he is, that infernal Italian will never spend such a moment with her. He may tell her that Cap Scague is a snow mountain, but he has not been ready to die with her. Dying is a simple and altogether undiplomatic occurrence. There is nothing about it in the *code de la civilité*, or the 'Manual of Diplomacy,' which is the Koran of these people." And he laughed aloud at the thought.

A hand was laid on his shoulder—it was the watchman who had already warned him for the third or fourth time to stay no longer.

"Can I not stand here?" cried Brédal hotly. He was in no humour to brook dictation.

"No one can stay here after tattoo," repeated the watchman, as he placed himself between Brédal and the water, as if he suspected him of intending to spring in.

"I am not mad, my friend, and I never

felt more inclined to live," said Brédal quietly.

"I daresay—but nobody can stand here after tattoo for all that," repeated the watchman.

Brédal turned on his heel and went home.

CHAPTER VIII.

Brédal saw nothing of the Countess for several days. The first time he met her he fancied she seemed to avoid him, and was more reserved in her manner than before. The thought made him absolutely miserable. He was still in this mood when he ran up against a friend of his, Baron Rabel, at a reception.

Rabel was a young man of good family, large fortune, and considerable *savoir faire.* He was a plucky fellow, hotheaded, and very precipitate in his judgments, but a fast friend. For the rest, he rode capitally, sang little French romances very charmingly, and was a most coveted partner at all the balls.

"Hullo, Brédal!" he cried, "I haven't seen you for an eternity. You look as if each of your eyes were a fully primed pistol.

What is the matter with you? Come along—let's go the round, and see what is going on. You shall help me to say something spiteful of everyone."

He took Brédal's arm, and they walked through the rooms together. When they reached the card-room, Brédal asked—

"Who is that man standing over there?"

"That is my uncle, Privy Councillor Breusing. He is a splendid old fellow. Don't you think him like the portraits of Talleyrand? He has just the same bland, mean-everything-and-nothing sort of expression. There comes General Hartmann. He wants an appointment for his son-in-law, and I know for a fact that he has set two ladies of the Court on my uncle to try and get him to promise, but they'll find him as slippery as an eel. Look at him now! Isn't it a splendid face? And his red silk pocket-handkerchief—doesn't it make a gorgeous effect at an evening party? There goes the

General. He might just as well fall back on the last resource at once. You know what that is?"

"I must confess my ignorance," said Brédal, smiling.

"'Pon my soul, you *are* innocent! Well, the 'last resource' is a petition to the King—as 'a last grace after years of long and faithful service.' You can understand one has to be sparing with this sort of thing, for one can't well go in for it oftener than about every two years. Even this won't avail the General now, however, for my uncle has promised it to one of the family. One must make hay while the sun shines, you know. *Apropos* of hay, you must come and stay with me at Rosenthal this summer."

Without waiting for an answer, he added, "Oh! there is that charming Mdlle. d'Aubigny—let me introduce you," and, stepping quickly forward, he presented Brédal to

pretty Mdlle. d'Aubigny, one of the most fascinating members of the Corps Diplomatique.

He then left to pay his respects to the Marechale—for the mere purpose of interrupting her conversation with her acknowledged *cavaliere servente*, Count Mechlenberg.

Brédal began once more to envy the fund of small talk possessed by some people when his eyes fell upon the Countess Olfers.

"I will show her that I can also feel interested in other people," he thought, and in a few seconds he was to all appearance fathoms deep in a desperate flirtation with Mdlle. d'Aubigny.

When the Countess next looked at him he fancied that it was with somewhat less of her former icy reserve.

A move was now made to the music room. The piano was opened and people formed in groups around.

Prince Porzio followed the Countess and leant on the back of her chair. She sat sideways as if to avoid him. As she turned away from him, her eyes met Brédal's. She shrugged her shoulder on the Prince's side almost imperceptibly, as if she were lamenting her sad fate. The expression which came into Brédal's eyes sent hers quickly to the ground.

After the music dancing commenced, but the Countess could not be persuaded to remain. She was overwhelmed with regrets at her early departure.

Brédal followed them downstairs, and stood where he could be the last to see her leave, but she would not even look near him. Just as she was entering the carriage, however, she turned round, and gave him a most bewilderingly sweet smile. The Count was scolding his coachman for being late. Brédal stepped quickly forward, but did not speak. She said—

"Surely you are not going so early—they are going to dance."

"Why should I stay, when you have left?" answered Brédal, almost startled by his own words.

The Countess grew very pale, and did not answer.

The Count entered the carriage, and they drove off without Brédal's receiving a word in reply. He left a few seconds after in a distracted state.

"I am mad," he thought. "What must she think of me? This is the second time I have offended her. I—who would gladly give my life to procure her a moment's pleasure. She must know—she must feel how madly I love her! Perhaps even now she is laughing at the mad fool who dared to imply that he only lives, only exists for her."

Brédal crushed his hat over his eyes, and rushed along at a pace that hardly gave him

time to think. But he could not escape from the Furies set loose on his heart. They pursued him everywhere. They scourged him all through the still night until at last, towards dawn, he fell into a deep, exhausted slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

The following day was the sixth of December, the Queen of Spain's birthday. The Spanish Ambassador gave a magnificent ball in her honour, at which the King and Queen of Denmark were to be present.

Brédal had received an invitation, but had he not feared offending Baron von Breitenburg, who had been at considerable trouble to obtain it for him, would have undoubtedly remained at home in company with his own miserable thoughts.

The *fête* promised to be one of great brilliancy. The courtyard of the Hotel was illuminated with coloured lamps, and strewn with white sand to deaden the noise of the carriages. Corridors and staircase were a mass of the loveliest flowers. The rooms were almost too brilliantly lighted—they fairly dazzled the eyes. The ball-room was

exceptionally beautiful. The top of the room was decorated with the Spanish and Saxon arms, surmounted by gilt crowns, and costly silk draperies—blue, embroidered with golden lilies.

"For the Queen of Spain had been a Saxon Princess, and the three golden lilies are the King's family arms," explained the old Privy Councillor with much unction to Brédal.

The rooms were rapidly filling, and almost all our old acquaintances were present. The Royal personages had not yet arrived, nor had the Countess made her appearance. Brédal was standing somewhat apart, and his face clearly betrayed his depression. Baron von Breitenburg came up to him, and said rather pettishly—

"Are you out of temper? You mustn't show it like this if you are. A diplomat ought to have no temper at all—good or bad."

"A diplomat must not be mortal then?" asked Brédal laconically. "Is he condemned to become an everlasting automaton?"

"Not exactly," replied the Baron somewhat testily. "But he must learn self-control, and not wear his heart on his sleeve. Look at your face in that glass. *C'est de mauvais grace au bal; c'est inconvenable.*"

Brédal flushed up to the roots of his hair at the detested word. He did not trust himself to reply.

When he had cooled a little he thought, "He is right. Whatever happens we must not sin against *les convenances.*" And he did his best to look less gloomy.

In a few seconds he ran up against Baron Rabel, who was amusing himself as usual by turning everybody else into ridicule. He was particularly tickled at this moment by the Countess von Glehn's figure.

"She is really too absurd," he said, "even for the Corps Diplomatique, where one meets

all sorts of patterns. She always embodies the Roman law to me in one volume. Her stomach is the *corpus juris*, and her bust the dependent *pandects*. Don't you think the comparison fits?"

Brédal could not help laughing heartily.

Samarow now joined them, and said—

"While you are talking philosophy up here, there has been a grand row going on downstairs. Marechal d'Aubigny lost his temper because Lessing's coachman managed to pass his carriage and drove into the gateway first. He gave him a blow with his sword."

"With his sword?" asked Rabel. "That was very gracious. In doing so, he used his privilege as peer of France and created him a knight. Lucky coachman!"

Baron Lessing entered the room with his usual half serious, half smiling face.

"It is the calm before the storm," whispered Samarow.

Soon after the doors were thrown wide open to admit the Marechal and his daughter. She was as pale as her father was flushed. He seemed undecided whether to bluster or to control his anger. All eyes were fixed upon him.

Lessing alone seemed oblivious of his existence. The Marechal stepped up to him, and said—

"You must see yourself, M. le Baron, that the unpleasantness which has occurred between us—"

"M. le Marechal," interrupted Lessing with a very low bow, "I have made it an invariable rule never to interfere in the quarrels of my servants."

With which remark, after again bowing low, he turned on his heel.

"Bravo, bravo!" said Rabel to Brédal. "That was splendidly done. For the future Lessing shall be my guiding star. It was magnificent."

The Countess Olfers now arrived with her brother. She was very simply dressed in white. Her only ornament was a most magnificent diamond cross which hung from a girdle at her waist. Her perfect arms and neck were absolutely unadorned. She wore her hair twisted round her head in a soft coil. She looked indescribably lovely.

The first person she saw in the room was Brédal, but she passed him as if oblivious of his existence. He tasted to the full the bitterness of being ignored. He saw how cordially she spoke to Baron Lessing, with what grace she accepted all the compliments paid her. She was already engaged several dances deep, and had never even deigned to glance near him.

All at once the circle opened. The diplomatic ladies sank almost to the ground, the gentlemen all bowed profoundly. The Royal Personages had entered, accompanied by the Spanish Legation, which had received them on the stairs.

A few moments afterwards the ball opened. The door of the ball-room was soon crammed with spectators, amongst whom was Brédal.

"Who is that dancing there?" asked Councillor Dahlmann, who was perched on his toes, trying to see over other people's shoulders.

"The Countess Olfers," answered Samarow. "She is undoubtedly the belle of the ball. Isn't that Lagardie dancing with her? Ah, *regardez donc!*"

Before Brédal could turn round the Countess was half way round the room, and he did not see what caused the exclamation.

"Madame d'Aubigny is certainly nowhere beside her," remarked a gentleman, "although Mechlenberg swears she is lovely. I ventured to remind him the other day that the lady was no longer in her first youth, and he retorted with that reply of Scribe's—'*Elle a quarante printemps, et voila tout!*'"

They all laughed.

An old lady in a flaming orange-coloured headdress, and a lemon-coloured face, surmounted by a blazing diamond star, here informed the speaker that Madame d'Aubigny's age was forty-two. She further added that the Countess Olfers' beauty was of a very fragile order, and likely to very soon become *passèe.*

Having delivered herself of this judgment, she made a move, and as everyone got out of the way, Brédal availed himself of the passage made thereby to reach the next room, where he found Rabel, Lessing, and some more.

"Your Excellency is very late," said Lessing to a tall, distinguished-looking man with a jovial face.

"Despatches, *mon cher*, despatches! I have had an awful batch to-day—something dreadful! Have worked like a horse to get here at all."

"Ah, I believe it, your Excellency," an-

swered Lessing. "You are a perfect Hercules in diplomacy."

"Prince Porzio seems to be laying most desperate siege to the Countess Olfers," said Lord Malden, who had been looking at the dancers through his eye-glasses. "He is certainly a 'great' admirer," he added smiling.

Vicompte Lagardie now succeeded in working his way through the crowd. He looked quite radiant.

Baron von Breitenburg said—

"Well, how do you find Copenhagen? I believe you expect more than Paris itself could fulfil."

"*Allez donc!* Paris can fulfil everything. Don't you know that when *le bon Dieu* has *ennui* he opens one of the windows of heaven and looks down on the Boulevards *pour s'amuser.* But Copenhagen—*c'est une ville barbare!*"

"A thorough Parisian," said the American, Stobart, as the Vicompte passed on. "He

divides the world into two sections—Paris and Siberia. Out of Paris he finds everything barbarous, and yet a Parisian amuses himself everywhere."

"What about that armed neutrality that Lord Malden is discussing with the Secretary of the Spanish Legation?" asked Baron von Breitenburg.

"I really don't know," answered Stobart; "but, judging from their manner, I should imagine it to be the English one. You have heard of a member of Parliament's reply to the Duke of Wellington on being asked what he understood by an armed neutrality—'That depends upon circumstances, my Lord. Her Majesty's Ministers have always understood it as a deuced ticklish situation.'"

The Baron smiled, and left him to ask Brédal why he was not dancing. He excused himself with a headache. When he was speaking to the Baron the Countess Olfers'

eyes rested on him, to be withdrawn the instant he again faced the room.

"He can actually smile and look pleased," she thought. "What a charming face it is when he smiles; and those big brown eyes of his light up! All that English coldness disappears—but it is only momentary—there is the old shadow again. He is as bored as I am."

Vicompte Lagardie had been speaking for several seconds to the Countess without her having been in the least conscious of it. He was quite lost in speculation as to the reason of her being so *distraite*, and he left her with a mingled feeling of pique and gratified vanity at the possibility of having been the cause of her distraction.

Brédal was strolling through the rooms when he came upon a group discussing the merits of Danish women.

As he came up, Prince Porzio was saying in his piping falsetto—

"All Danish ladies are thorough-going flirts, and one can have as much of that kind of thing here as one likes—according to my experience."

Brédal could not remain silent when he heard this opinion. He turned to the Prince with a laconic "Indeed!" which expressed a volume of doubts.

The Italian accepted the challenge, and began a rambling account of an acquaintance he had managed to scrape "without much trouble with an exceedingly pretty woman in the park."

Brédal did not recognise that there was any proof of her belonging to the upper classes.

"But that *was* the case," said the Prince, and then he told several other circumstances in proof of his assertion.

Brédal looked at him somewhat superciliously and said—

"That is a very wonderful story."

At these words the Prince for the first time

recognised Brédal as his opponent in the Cap Scague question. He was irritated by so much temerity, and repeated—

"But *I* say that such was the case—*I* say it!"

In Brédal's present mood he was by no means disinclined for a quarrel. He looked all over the Prince, smiled, and shook his head.

Prince Porzio grew fiery red, and could hardly splutter out the words—

"Gentlemen, I pledge you my word of honour that the facts were exactly as I have told them. I hope this will outweigh this gentleman's doubts."

It could be plainly read on all faces how disagreeable this wrangle was to the diplomats standing round. They would have expressed it more openly had they not been deterred by Brédal's reputation as a duellist.

But their sympathy with the Prince was

plainly apparent. Their evident displeasure restored Brédal's coolness. He felt the necessity of not losing his self-control; and, looking the Prince once more from head to foot with the same supercilious sneer, he said, with a smile which was cutting in its satire, "As it is not a joke of the Prince's, as I at first believed, I must thank His Highness in your presence, gentlemen, for the compliment he has paid me in making me the confidant of this adventure, while the lady of course trusted entirely to his discretion. I really do not know how to thank you, Prince, for so flattering a confidence in a Dane."

He then bowed profoundly and left the room. Baron von Breitenburg joined him at the door, and said, "Well and neatly done, my friend. I have seldom seen anything better managed."

The Countess had been sitting on a sofa in the adjoining room, and had heard the

whole scene without being able to see the speakers.

Brédal took up his stand in the ball-room doorway. The Countess rose and made a *détour* to pass through this door.

Brédal's temporary self-satisfaction had already been succeeded by an exceeding bitterness against everybody and everything, when he heard the Countess's voice behind him saying—

"Count Ignazi would be quite grieved if he saw one of his guests looking so *triste*. Your face, M. de Brédal, is a satire on the entertainment. Good Heavens!" she continued, as Brédal still remained silent, "have you committed any terrible crime that you are condemned to do penance for?"

"Does your ladyship imply that I have again been guilty of something that is *inconvenable?*" asked Brédal with a bow as he flushed hastily, partly from vexation and partly from pleasure.

"On the contrary," said the Countess, and her previous lightness of tone at once disappeared. "I believe, on the contrary, that you understand the real meaning of the word."

Brédal looked at her so earnestly that a faint pink flush rose in her cheeks. She was silent for a moment, then she continued with more animation, "I fancy you look at the entertainment through the same spectacles as myself. Is it not odd that one sees sad faces at all our entertainments? What can be the reason of all this melancholy?"

Her light tone infected Bredal, and he said "It seems very natural to me that the Countess Olfers should make a great many people miserable wherever she goes."

"I should not have expected such a *fade* compliment from you—at any rate not in answer to a serious question. Don't you sometimes feel how true it is that pleasure is a daughter of grief? Could you imagine

being here if any great happiness had come to you?"

"I defend evening parties," said Brédal, "for some of the happiest moments of my life have been spent at them."

"In Munich, perhaps, when you were so *épris* with the Princess de Wittenberg. I heard of that, I imagine, on the steamer when I was travelling here."

"On the steamer"—repeated Brédal slowly. "And you probably found it very *inconvenable* that I at one time should have been *épris* with a Princess?"

"On the contrary, I admire your good taste. But we are forgetting all about the ball. Don't you dance?"

"I have been introduced to so few ladies," Brédal excused himself.

"Then why don't you dance with those you know already?" smiled the Countess. "I belong to those favoured few—but perhaps you don't want to dance with me?"

"Countess!"

"M. de Brédal! If you don't make haste, Prince Porzio will be before you. There, now you see the wonders envy can work," she continued as Brédal offered her his arm. "I owe the honour of dancing a cotillon with you to that noble sentiment."

These last words were said in a most rallying tone, but even Brédal could find no sting in them at this happy moment.

In spite of his unwieldy stature, Prince Porzio had really intended to ask the Countess to dance.

As Brédal carried her off, he stood looking after them for a moment, as if he could hardly realise that he, Prince Porzio, had been defeated twice in the same evening by the same obscure person. He worked himself through the crowd until he reached the first row of spectators, where he took up his stand directly behind the Countess's chair.

There is a method of making oneself ob-

noxious which is too impalpable to be called to account for.

Prince Porzio did not consider it beneath his dignity to have recourse to this method. His eyes followed Brédal with a supercilious expression until Brédal looked at him, when they were instantly withdrawn, accompanied by an almost imperceptible smile.

Brédal bit his lips, for he saw that the Prince adopted these tactics for the mere purpose of annoying him, and yet he fully realised the impossibility of demanding satisfaction for a smile.

The Countess also noticed the proceeding, and, complaining of the heat, sent Brédal for some iced claret cup. When he returned she had so changed her position as to take Brédal out of the Prince's focus. He then came up and asked the Countess to dance the next waltz with him.

"If my partner permits," she answered smiling.

The Prince was thus obliged at last to turn towards Brédal, who bowed slightly.

The colossal Italian had not foreseen that, for a man of his weight, and a bad dancer into the bargain, the rapid pace of a waltz would soon prove too much. He positively panted for breath as he brought the Countess back to her chair.

She was the only person who did not smile when this wonderful dance was over, and resumed her conversation with Brédal, as if it had never been interrupted.

"And why don't you ever dance the cotillon?" she asked.

"I have really no reason at all," said Brédal, "except that I had registered a vow never to do so. It is one of those vows one keeps until one gets a good excuse for breaking it."

"If that is the case I will provide one for you. You may pretend that I have demanded it of you. But perhaps you would not find

that a sufficiently valid reason for overcoming a scruple of conscience?"

"An ample reason. I am only afraid that my imagination is not sufficiently vivid to realize such wonders—or that prudence would counsel me to do battle with the temptation—should it be cast in my way," he hastened to add, for he imagined he saw the shadow of a smile in her eyes.

"You are dreadfully suspicious, M. de Brédal. It was really my intention not to demand the favour of you, but to ask it. You are really too suspicious."

"Indeed, I am not—of you!" said Brédal, looking down at her with an expression that was a caress in itself, and prevented the Countess looking up at him again for a few seconds.

"The company is very mixed to-night," said Prince Porzio to Baron Lessing, who stood close behind Brédal. "There are all sorts of people here. I don't care about this

soi-disant liberal mixture. I can never understand how it is these people can have the impudence to intrude themselves among us."

Although the Prince spoke low, every word reached, as they were intended to, Brédal's ears.

"What did you say?" asked Lessing.

The Prince repeated what he had said before. The Baron shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell me," continued the Prince; "is Cap Scague a mountain, or is it a valley?"

"Cap Scague? Really, I am not certain; but I should imagine it must be a mountain."

"Of course. Whoever heard of a valley being called Cap? One might as well call Mont Blanc a valley. I'll tell you what, one must be as ignorant as a Dane to assert such nonsense."

Brédal's blood boiled. He turned quickly to the Prince and said—

"What do you mean?"

"I? I mean that one need not come to Denmark to learn what a mountain is."

"You did not intend to imply anything further then?"

"I implied what I chose," answered the Prince, and his voice sounded more squeaky than ever; "and I certainly have no intention of translating my words for the benefit of the first person who asks."

Brédal was on the point of replying hotly when a glass shivered to the ground, breaking into a thousand fragments, and spilling the contents all over the Countess's white dress. She rose and said—

"Really, Baron Lessing, you are too *distrait*. How could you have the heart to sacrifice my poor dress to that abominable Cap Scague?"

"I—I—?" stammered the Baron, horrified.

"There is something wonderful about these clever people," said the Countess,

smiling. "I suppose you really do not know that in your enthusiasm about Cap Scague you knocked the glass off the table with your elbow. Just look at my poor dress! But it is all your fault, Prince. You are really too sceptical. Cap Scague is *not* a mountain, I assure you. Will you give me your arm, M. de Brédal? I must go and try and get myself made presentable."

While Baron Lessing was profuse in apologies for his misfortune, and the servants were picking up the fragments of broken glass, Brédal took the Countess into the next room, from whence she disappeared into one of the adjoining ante-chambers.

Lessing once more measured the distance between the table and his elbow, and was still more mystified by the calamity which had befallen him.

"I must have been nearer than I imagined," he said to Prince Porzio.

But the Prince did not hear him. He was

following his rival with wrathful eyes, and and still more wrathful thoughts.

Brédal threw himself on a sofa. They were still playing the waltz the Countess had asked him to dance with her. The ebbing and flowing of this tide of music seemed like a reflection of his own life. He forgot all about Prince Porzio. He could only repeat over and over to himself "She is not angry with me; she does not dispise me."

Old Privy Councillor Dahlmann, trotted in at this moment. Brédal reminded him of his promise to tell him something about the Olfers family. The Councillor was an enthusiastic hunter of the histories of all the old noble families. He told Brédal that the Olfers were descended from one of Charles the Fifth's Generals, who had greatly distinguished himself in war and diplomacy.

Count Olfer's mother had, as a young girl, twice saved her father's life during the

French Revolution, and had only escaped being murdered with him by marvellous good fortune.

"They are a splendid race, who can look back with pride to their ancestors. The present Countess has taken her own name again in preference to the more aristocratic Spanish one, which is hers by right, and belongs to a family which has pretensions to the Spanish throne. She is as indifferent to money as she is proud. '*Á la bonne heure!* she is rich enough to be so. Well, *au revoir*, we shall meet again."

"What an immense advantage these people possess over us," Brédal thought; "they can live in a world far above the petty cares and interests of everyday life, which chain us down to the few miserable moments we have to live. They are never obliged to make that wretched question of ways and means their God, or to embitter every happiness by the shadow of a reckoning

day. She is rich enough. Why am I not at least sufficiently so to be able to give up this sort of subordinate and dependent position I occupy with Baron von Breitenburg. However kind he is to me it always seems to me like patronage. Patronage! Faugh—that is the most detestable word in the whole language."

The Countess returned with some ladies. Brédal sprang up. When she had taken leave of her friends she came up to him and said—

"I am so sorry to disturb you in the midst of your speculations, Mr. Philosopher! May one ask what was the subject of them?"

Brédal was tired of tormenting himself, and he acknowledged candidly what he had been thinking of. The Countess smiled approvingly. Brédal flushed painfully as he spoke of his poverty to one so rich. But his whole manner and bearing showed most

clearly his courage and determination to do battle with the disadvantage Fate had placed him at.

The Countess could not help thinking that at that moment Brédal was the most irresistibly attractive man she had ever met. As she drew her wraps round her she said, "I thought you suspicious, but I retract. I have come to the conclusion that pride is your strongest passion—perhaps your only one."

"My strongest passion—my only one? You are right; I have only one passion, and that is in no degree humble. If I am proud it is you who have made me so. With all my pride, I am only a slave of—"

"Nevertheless, you must cultivate humility," interrupted the Countess. "I will test your self-control, and ask you to avoid a quarrel with Prince Porzio. He will do his best to offend you, and his position will make this easier for him—"

"While mine compels me to endure it," interrupted Brédal.

She slightly flushed as she continued, "And yours must raise you above a want of cultivation and good taste that places a Prince on a level with his valet. You must not forget how disagreeable such a quarrel is to us—it would be personally so to me," she added somewhat lower.

Brédal bowed silently.

"Then I have your word. It will be a difficult matter to manage, but you have already shown to-night what you are capable of. Keep cool, however, for I haven't always a glass of claret in my hand to avoid a disturbance."

Brédal looked questioningly at her.

"Did you really think poor Lessing was so clumsy as I made him believe. Poor innocent Baron Lessing! He overwhelmed me with never-ending excuses, and his only crime

was in standing so very conveniently. And now that I have given you a good lecture, I must say good-night, for my carriage is waiting." The Countess bowed with a charming smile.

Brédal did not realise that she was leaving him until she had nearly reached the door. Hardly conscious of what he was doing, he followed her quickly, and, without a word, pressed a corner of her mantle to his lips.

The Countess half turned towards him, drew the shawl gently from his hand, and closed the door after her.

A few seconds later, Brédal rushed down the stairs, but the carriage had already driven off.

CHAPTER X.

The following day, Brédal, as soon as he had completed all the tasks imposed upon by Fate—in the person of Baron von Breitenburg—hurried to the Countess's villa.

"The Countess is at home." As the man preceded him, Brédal's imagination was busily employed in picturing a charming interior with the Countess as the only living figure.

When the door opened, how disappointing was the reality! In the room—it was the Countess's favourite morning room—sat two persons. One was a young man of about six-and-twenty, who sat in an arm chair with his legs crossed, lost in admiration of his very smart socks and patent leather shoes. Brédal had never seen him before. The other was the English Attaché, Mr. Swinton, whom Brédal had met constantly. He was a

young man, with typically English features, and fair hair. Although he was really particularly *soigné* in appearance, he always affected a sort of studied carelessness in dress. He was half lying on the sofa reading. As Brédal entered he glanced over the top of his book, nodded, and continued reading.

The other man slightly bowed, and then put up his eye glass to stare at Brédal, who went to the window, and turned his back on both.

At last ladies' voices were heard in the adjoining room. Brédal turned round, the man with the eye-glass stood up, the Englishman did not move until the Countess and Madame d'Aubigny entered the room.

The Countess greeted the man with the eye-glass with much cordiality, and introduced him to Madame d'Aubigny as her cousin, the Marquis de Mirecourt, who had just arrived from Paris on his way to Stockholm, where he had been appointed Secretary to the French Legation.

She then turned to Brédal, and returned his bow with one of so diplomatic a pattern that he wished himself a thousand miles away.

Conversation turned on political news—on the latest Paris fashions, and all the charming trifles the Marquis had brought his pretty cousin from Paris, and which he had found an opportunity of presenting earlier in the morning.

Brédal instantly jumped to the conclusion that he had had a long *tête-à-tête* with the Countess. Brédal felt the demon of jealousy gnawing away at his heart twenty times more fiercely than when Prince Porzio was in question. Because she had spoken cordially to him, because her eyes had met his several times, because she had asked him to dance with her, and had even spoilt her dress to avoid his becoming involved in a quarrel; these, in Brédal's opinion, were all sufficient reasons for his monopolising all her favour

and all her smiles. It was unbearable to see a stranger basking in them—more especially as this "stranger" happened to be a relation, an earlier and more intimate acquaintance, young, good-looking, rich, and distinguished.

While all these thoughts were tormenting our poor hero, he might have heard, had he listened, that Baron von Breitenburg had been present the whole time at the morning's (supposed) *tête-à-tête*, and the Countess rallying her cousin about his admiration for a lady in Rome, to whom rumour had engaged him.

All this, which would have been so much balm to his wounds, entirely escaped Brédal. When he again attended to the conversation, they were talking of some relations in Paris, of whom he had never heard.

"Tante Mathieu has done her best to scandalise the rest of the family by countenancing her daughter Eugénie's marriage with a stocking manufacturer," said the Marquis.

"What?" exclaimed Madame d'Aubigny,

"Countess Eugénie married to a stocking-maker! Why she refused the young Duc de Torrent when I was in Paris."

"But Madame Mathieu is herself of good family, as far as I remember of my stay in Paris," said Mr. Swinton somewhat superciliously.

"Yes, quite right," answered the Marquis. "My uncle made her acquaintance during his stay in England. At a critical moment he covered his escutcheon with a flour-sack for the sake of the golden guineas at the bottom of it. Her father was a flour-dealer in the city, who became an alderman, and gave his family a rise in the world when he retired from business. She was called Sween—Sweeny—or Sweenton, or some such name before she became the Countess Mathieu."

"I cannot get over my surprise at the fascinating little Mathieu becoming—what is her name?—Madame Lebas. What do you think, Countess, of your new cousin?"

"I? I say there are no *mésalliances* of birth now-a-days. The only *mésalliances* lie in lack of sympathy, education, and, for a little time longer, of fortune. *Ils sont passés, ces jours de fêtes!*"

"You are an extravagant dreamer," said the Marechâle.

"Tante Mathieu would be delighted to hear such words from an Olfers—a family that can look back upon generations of ancestors," said the Marquis, as he examined the pretty fernery through his glass.

"I think Eugénie was perfectly right," said the Countess. "I always understood that she liked M. Lebas. I have great faith in the saying that 'love ennobles.'"

Brédal did not dare to glance near her, and the Countess was equally careful not to run the danger of meeting his eyes. She stood up and drew Madame d'Aubigny's attention to her flowers.

Brédal soon took leave. He feared that

his happiness would beam from his eyes and betray him.

The Countess bade him good-bye in a most reserved manner, but this wounded him as little as the fact that most of the company were totally oblivious of his departure.

The Marquis raised his glass, but as Brédal reached the door satisfactorily, and as no fault could be found in his manner, he let it fall again, and only enquired who he was.

"M. de Brédal, a young Dane, and an intimate friend of the Austrian Ambassador's," said the Countess, who wished to increase the estimation of the present for the absent, and knew that there was only one way of accomplishing this.

"Oh, now I understand," said the Marquis. "That is the reason why he was dumb. There is a most remarkable resemblance here between the two and four-legged animals—they are all speechless. Just before I left Paris I saw some very nice dogs, who

couldn't bark. They told me they were real Danish dogs. This gentleman is the first specimen of a real Danish cavalier that I have come across. He doesn't, however, seem to be able to give tongue any more than his long-haired compatriots in Paris."

"M. le Marquis has retained all his old impertinence," said Madame d'Olfers with a slight flush.

"*Pardon, ma cousine!* I did not know that I should offend you by the comparison."

"Not in the least—it is always my principle to defend the absent. I wish you would postpone passing judgment on the Danes until you have had some personal experience of them. But I suppose that is too much to expect of a Parisian."

"*Pout du tout, Madame!* We young people of Paris do more thinking in a day than our forefathers achieved in a life-time. I think it a great mistake. *Il faut s'amuser, Madame, il n'ya que cela de réel dans la vie.*"

The Countess laughed.

She felt that her defence of Brédal and the Danes had almost aroused de Mirecourt's suspicions, and she dreaded the lynx eyes of a thorough man of the world.

CHAPTER XI.

The Marquis de Millecourt's advent in Copenhagen made a perceptible difference in the Countess's life. Far from encouraging Brédal, he found it almost impossible to exchange a word with her, still more to meet a glance which would tell him that he was not entirely forgotten for the new comer. The Countess dreaded her cousin's observant eyes, and she plainly saw that from the very first day of their meeting he regarded Brédal with suspicion.

The Marquis was desirous of appearing in Copenhagen with all possible prestige. His near relationship to the most beautiful and popular woman in the Corps Diplomatique was very welcome to him. As a cousin he could always be in attendance on the Countess, and he invariably managed to make his attentions

just sufficiently marked to give outsiders the idea of a favoured suitor, while to the Countess herself his manner was tinged with a sort of brotherly warmth which she found it impossible to repel.

In addition to the torture all this gave Brédal he had also to listen with patience to the grumblings and abuse of the new arrival indulged in by the other men of his set. They were jealous of the conquest the Marquis had succeeded in making after so short a siege.

"Bah—don't tell me! That is an old engagement," said Samarow. "Madame d'Olfers is not won in a month."

"The Marquis is an unendurably conceited puppy," squeaked Prince Porzio. "There is something so unmanly in his lady-like figure that I can't understand any woman admiring him."

"His figure is certainly rather effeminate," said Baron von Breitenburg, "but he has a

charming voice, and that is a great thing in his favour with women."

"The figure is the principal thing after all though. The voice is quite secondary—at any rate in my experience," answered Prince Porzio.

In spite of his ill-humour Brédal could not repress a smile at the idea of Prince Porzio's "experiences."

"There is no doubt that Count Olfers would prefer his sister marrying again," said Lagardie, "and de Mirecourt is a *protegé* of his."

"But a marquis is not a suitable *parti* for the widow of a Grandee of Spain," returned Prince Porzio. "She ought to look out for a duke at least."

"My opinion is," said Lessing, "that Madame d'Olfers cares as little for de Mirecourt as for any of us here—with perhaps one exception," and he looked towards the Prince, who smiled as if he were only

too delighted to find his hallucination confirmed.

The expression of self-satisfied conceit with which he surveyed the circle was well worth the little trouble Lessing had taken to make the vain and amorous Italian believe that his passion was returned.

* * * * * *

Brédal was still in the same gloomy mood when Goldberg came in a few days later to see him.

"I have a pass for the theatre to-night," he cried; "come along!"

Brédal tried to avoid going on the ground of lack of time and inclination, but Goldberg would not listen to him.

"One can always make time," he said. "Nothing is so long as time if one manages it properly, and the inclination will come as soon as we get there."

It was one of those evenings in early

spring when the days begin to lengthen. Inside the house the lights struggled with the daylight, which peeped in at all the doors and cracks.

Brédal and Goldberg seated themselves in the first row of the pit.

As the house began to fill two showily-dressed and rather questionable looking women took the seats next Brédal. Something said by Goldberg soon gave them an opportunity of commencing a conversation, and they were laughing very loudly at some extremely broad stage "business" when the door of one of the private boxes opened and the Marechâle d'Aubigny, accompanied by the Countess Olfers and a number of the diplomatic set, entered.

At that moment the girl sitting next Brédal directed his attention to the box. He looked up and met the Countess's eyes. She turned away without taking the faintest notice of

him. All the other occupants of the box now recognised him.

The Marechâle turned round to Porzio, and levelled her glass full at the pit. Porzio whispered a few words in her ears, and looked down with a sneering smile at Brédal. Samarow nodded, and made signs to him as to how amusing he found the whole scene.

Brédal could have sank into the earth with humiliation. He cursed Goldberg in his heart for persuading him to come, and he cursed the unlucky chance which had placed the two women beside them.

The Marquis de Mirecourt was also in the box. He leant over the Countess and said—

"*Regardez donc*, Madame, is not that gentleman M—, M—, what is his name? I have met him at your house. No—there below—with those young ladies with the feathers."

The Countess was obliged to glance in the

specified direction to put a stop to the Marquis' pointing, but she turned her head away again instantly, and leant her cheek on her hand as if she were trying to shut out the whole scene.

This was the last straw. Brédal left his seat and sat at the end of the bench, directly underneath the box, and quite out of the Countess's sight. It was a perfect godsend to him when Samarow leaned over and said—

"You seem to be studying the 'people' to-night. Come up here and tell us all about it."

These words restored Brédal's presence of mind, and he entered the box thoroughly aware that his only chance of escape from his compromising predicament lay in his power of successfully drawing the long bow.

The Countess did not deign to turn round, but Samarow stormed him with questions.

Brédal denied his acquaintance with any

single person in the pit—"where he had gone merely for the novelty of the thing."

Astonishing how valid such a reason appears, especially to the diplomatic mind!

Brédal then went on to tell, loud enough for the Countess to hear, how the two girls were ladies' maids out for a holiday—how the one had conceived a sudden penchant for himself, and the other for the student sitting next him. How they had told him all about their respective mistresses, whom he himself knew, etc., etc. All of which lies Brédal told so naturally as to absolutely astonish himself, and made him bless the French language—for he rather doubted possessing an equal power of invention in his mother tongue.

Samarow was delighted with the whole affair, and wanted to go down to the pit with Brédal, who, however, made the commencement of the last piece an excuse for not complying. He had noticed that while he was

telling his romance, the Countess had narrowly examined his ci-devant companions through her opera glass. Shortly after, she turned round to him with a kindly smile.

The gentlemen disappeared one after the other. They were invited to sup with the Marechal d'Aubigny, and his wife and daughter had arranged to spend the rest of the evening with the Countess Olfers.

As Brédal was seeing them to the carriage, the Countess offered him the fourth seat, and asked him to come and have supper with them.

"I am most thankful to you, dear Countess, for this idea," said the Marechâle as they were driving off. "I had expected to be bored to death by that dreadful old Count Lubimoff, who would have been our only hope if we hadn't caught you, M. de Brédal. Don't be angry with me, Countess, but you know I really can't get on without Mechlenberg. He must, however, be at my husband's

supper to-night. It is really very kind of you to take pity on us in our forlorn condition, M. de Brédal. You must be most amusing to-night."

"But you forget, mamma," said Mdlle. d'Aubigny, "that you particularly asked Count Lubimoff to tell us something of his past life to-night."

"But I did not know then, *mon enfant*, that M. de Brédal was so much more entertaining. Lubimoff no longer interests me."

When gentlemen were present the Marechâle always called her grown-up daughter "my child."

"That is no excuse," said the Countess, "for to-night you must be content with what the Count will tell you. When there is another supper I promise you that M. de Brédal shall use his talent to amuse you—always understood that he does not desert us lonely ones for the gentlemen."

"Oh for Heaven's sake don't, M. de Brédal!

You must really promise us. You will save us from that most dreadful of all martyrdoms —being bored!"

The carriage flew quickly on.

For the first time in his life, Brédal felt as if Fate smiled upon him. An accident which might have disgraced him for ever had been the means of procuring him these happy hours—free from the presence of those who embittered every moment.

The old Count had been waiting some time for them.

They all served themselves at supper, to be able to send the servants out of the room. The Marechâle arranged her own sofa-cushion, the Countess rolled an easy-chair to the table for Count Lubimoff. Brédal went to help her, and his hand fell upon hers; she did not withdraw it. He brought a foot-stool and placed it, kneeling, under her feet, but she did not dare to look into those pleading brown eyes.

Mdlle. d'Aubigny told the old man all about the play, and when she spoke of the dancing he said—

"A ballet-dancer cost me many a heart-ache long, long ago."

"Were you so very unhappy?" smiled the Marechâle.

"It is the fate of unrequited love to be laughed at in this world. *Mésalliances* earn pity and sympathy, but everyone laughs at disappointed love. Yet that is always the consequence of a *mésalliance*—it is the *mésalliance* of the soul which is the worst of all."

Brédal looked at the Countess. She had drawn her chair closer to the table. The argantine lamp shed its full light on her pale face. Her beautiful profile was thrown into still stronger relief by the dark blue hangings in the background. "The three steps that lie between us," he thought, "are an insurmountable, impregnable wall. I worship her. She knows it, and forgives me in her

heart, perhaps. And yet—there lies that impassable barrier between us. *Mésalliance! Inconvenable!* I acquire a knowledge of the language at the cost of my life. I have paid dearly to learn the meaning of those two words, which only consist of five syllables—yet everyone of these five syllables has the power of robbing me of my senses," and he sighed deeply.

The Countess looked up and said, "What a sigh! And what a serious face! Is anything wrong?"

Brédal leant over the back of her chair, and bent down until his lips almost touched her hair. The blood surged up in his head, and his self control flew to the winds. Why did she ask him that question? He answered almost harshly—

"Do you not know?"

The Countess paled visibly, then a sudden hot flush surged all over her neck and face. She bent her head down and whispered—

"Yes, I know. But if you do not want to make me unhappy you must not look so. Do you not know that—"

She stopped suddenly, and trembled from head to foot.

Brédal was incapable of uttering a syllable. Count Lubimoff addressed him, but he had not heard the question, nor was he capable of answering. He poured himself out a glass of water, and drained it to gain time.

It was already late. The Marechâle had got sleepy, and had sent for her carriage.

Brédal waited in vain for a glance to complete the interrupted sentence. It was fruitless. The Countess had resumed her usual reserved manner, and bade him good-night as if no word had passed between them. He almost forgot the previous words, which, at any other time, would have half maddened him with joy. "Do you not know that—what?—that I love you, that I am a Countess—that *mésalliances* do not answer—that I am

uninfluenced by their prejudices? Oh, God! I would give my life to have this one sentence completed—this one sentence which would give me life or death."

Mrs. Bunkeflod was still up when he reached home, waiting to tell him that a messenger from Baron von Breitenburg had left word for him to come to his Excellency without losing a moment.

Brédal was much startled, and at once took it for granted that the old man had become suddenly ill. It was almost two o'clock. He hurried to the Baron's. A travelling carriage stood before the door. Baron von Breitenburg was pacing impatiently up and down the room, waiting for Brédal. He called him a vaurien, and a night-bird, who went to bed when respectable people thought of getting up. The old man rubbed his hands, and seemed in an unusually good humour.

"Are you ready to start?" he asked.

"Ready to start!" repeated Brédal, mechanically.

"A diplomat must be always ready. In a quarter of an hour you must be on your way to Vienna. You have to deliver this letter into Prince Metternich's own hands. There is your passport. Nobody must know what has become of you, and at your lodgings they must think you are gone into the country. There is a fur travelling-coat. Here is money and letters of credit. You need not take any clothes with you, you can get them *en route*. The thing is to gain a twelve hours' start. A pleasant journey, my friend!"

Brédal stood as if he had been turned to stone.

"To travel, your Excellency?" he repeated. "To Vienna, and now—now this very moment?"

"For Heaven's sake, don't make any excuses, but go!" cried the Baron hastily. Then in a milder tone he added—

"I will tell you in two words what has happened, and then, God speed you! That blessed fool of a Parisian, de Mirecourt, let out the secret at supper to-night. He blabbed it all out, and now it is going to Vienna twelve hours before Olfers can send off his cousin. That was a lucky supper! I have been waiting for this opportunity for a long time."

"But your Excellency, I am a Dane. I must ask your word of honour that, in fulfilling your orders, I am not guilty of any treachery to my country. Your word of honour as Baron von Breitenburg, not as a diplomat."

The Baron looked kindlily at him, laid his hand on his shoulder, and said—

"You are a splendid fellow, Brédal. I give you my word of honour that this letter only relates to France and another country, which is not Denmark."

Brédal hesitated for a moment, and then said—

"Your Excellency will forgive me, but France is the Countess Olfers' fatherland. I do not wish—I fear I am abusing your indulgence, but—"

"The Countess Olfers! And so the wind blows in that quarter does it? I must have been blind not to have suspected it before. But I can also satisfy you absolutely on that point. You must disappear, and no one must guess that I have despatched a courier. One can travel very quickly to Vienna and back now-a-days, and I should like to see you soon again. Will you promise me to use despatch?"

Bredal smiled. The Baron laughed.

"I give you no instructions how to take care of your despatches. You have often heard how to lose them; do the opposite. And now, God speed, and return soon. You may safely leave your reputation in my hands. At any rate, France shall think nothing bad of you in your absence—that I promise you."

Brédal grasped his hand thankfully. The Baron helped him on with his coat, and handed him the despatches. Then he accompanied him to the door, and said, loud enough to be heard on the stairs—

"Much pleasure in the country. Make a good bag if you get any shooting, and stay as long as you like."

The carriage rolled out of the gate, and Brédal was on his way to Vienna. It was half-past two. The streets were quite empty. He took out his passport and despatches. The despatch was addressed to His Serene Highness, Prince Metternich, Winneberg, Ochsenhausen, Duke of Portella, etc., etc. The passport was made out for Mr. John Smith, Merchant, from Copenhagen.

CHAPTER XII.

Two months passed, and it was not until the end of June that Brédal landed at the Custom House at the end of the quay. He had hardly spoken two words since he had left Kiel. All his thoughts were monopolized by recollections of his voyage of nearly a year ago, and anticipations of the completion of that unfathomable sentence.

During these two interminable months he had been entirely without home news. He hurried off at once to Baron von Breitenburg to deliver his despatches, but the Baron was out driving, and not expected home till late. His valet thought he was spending the day at the Marechal d'Aubigny's villa. Brédal at once ordered his horse and determined to go in search of the Baron. He knew that the energetic old diplomat would be pleased by this zeal.

While he was waiting, he asked for news, and was regaled with the latest diplomatic gossip. Almost all the Ambassadors were away. Marechal d'Aubigny was in Paris. The Russian and English Ambassadors were also absent. The Marechâle had taken a villa in the suburbs with the d'Olfers, where they were passing the summer. The Marquis de Millecourt had left for Stockholm, and everybody now said that the Countess Olfers was going to be married to the millionaire, Baron Hansen, in the autumn. At any rate he was never out of the house.

Brédal threw himself into his saddle, and let his horse take what road he would. It happened to lead direct to the villa. The nearer he approached the less desirable it seemed to him to seek Baron von Breitenburg as he had intended.

He rode round the Zoological Gardens until it began to grow dark. Then he slowly returned to the house. By a round he

reached the high fence, bound his horse fast, and climbed over the hedge, which did its best with its thorns to resist his entry.

The garden was laid out in the English fashion, with many zigzag paths and groups of shrubs. The house stood on a turfy eminence, heading, as it were, a long avenue flanked on either side by trees. At the bottom of this avenue rolled the blue sea.

Availing himself of the dark paths, Brédal succeeded in reaching the house unobserved. The doors and windows were open, but Venetian shutters prevented his seeing into the room. He could hear the different voices plainly, and clearly distinguished the Countess Olfers from the rest.

With a jump he cleared the space between the last clump of trees and the house, and crept in the shadow right up to the window. But hearing alone did not satisfy him—he wanted also to see. With a beating heart and trembling feet he climbed upon the ledge

of the wall, and, steadying himself by one hand laid on the blind, succeeded in obtaining a view into the 'garden room' as it was called.

The Countess sat at a side table, and was leaning over to look at a paper, on which Baron Hansen, who was sitting beside her, was drawing something. Each time that he pushed the paper over to her she raised her head, and the full light of the lamp fell upon her face.

Baron von Breitenburg was playing picquet with Count Olfers. Neither diplomat dreamed that each was congratulating himself in his heart on having outwitted the other. Prince Porzio's back was turned to Brédal; he was telling a long story to which nobody listened, but which, *en revanche*, seemed to tickle himself amazingly. Madame d'Aubigny was struggling against sleep. She was bored to death, for Mechlenberg had left that morning for Pyrmont, where he had been ordered to take the waters.

Two servants were removing the tea and coffee cups. At last the Countess cried in her clear ringing voice—

"Just look! Who is that like? Isn't it splendid?"

"For heaven's sake leave me in peace," answered the Marechâle; "my thoughts were miles away from here," and she sighed.

The Countess looked again at the paper, and laughed heartily.

"Well, let me see it, if it is so amusing," said Madame d'Aubigny. "How can you laugh at such a thing? It is miserable! That is Prince Porzio; but it is much too fat. Who is the other?"

"May I see myself?" asked Prince Porzio. "This! No, I am not in the least like that. The other is a capital hit. It is that person —Baron von Breitenburg's protegé. What is his name?"

"Brédal?" asked Hansen, and laughed.

"No, you are quite wrong this time, mon Prince. The 'other' is no less than your very humble servant, and I flatter myself it is a splendid likeness."

"Apropos, where is that M. de Brédal gone?" asked the Marechâle. "The young man told such capital stories. One should never neglect people of talent. Do you remember promising him to me, Countess?"

"Heaven only knows where he is utilising his talent at the present moment," said Baron von Breitenburg. "When I last heard of him he had gone on a wild duck shooting expedition. Perhaps he has got shot himself, as he remains silent so long."

The Countess still continued looking absolutely unconcernedly at Hansen's caricature. She did not even seem to have heard Brédal's name.

The vexation of being so entirely forgotten caused him to make a sudden movement. His foot slipped, and, to save himself, he

caught hold of the Venetian blind. This of course gave way under his hand, and he was within an ace of falling bodily into the room.

Prince Porzio cried "Thieves!" The Marechâle fainted away on the sofa. The Baron and his opponent dropped their cards. Hansen and the servants rushed out of the house in pursuit of Brédal.

It was a summer's evening, when the days are longest, and the nights clearest, so it was not difficult for his pursuers to keep Brédal in sight, although they could not succeed in catching him. Unacquainted with the geography of the garden, he got confused in the labyrinth of paths, and returned again to the house.

To his horror he saw the clear space in front of the house as light as day in the moonlight, and his pursuers but a few hundred yards behind. He could have cried out with bitterness of spirit—discovery seemed inevitable!

For an instant he thought of acknowledging himself to Hansen, but a pistol fired from the house—no doubt to inspire terror in the thieves—changed his intention.

With a desperate leap he cleared the small canal which ran on one side of the garden, and disappeared into the bushes. Hansen followed close upon his heels, and endeavoured to clear the jump too, but only succeeded in falling up to his middle in the slimy water.

So the chase ended; Hansen was fished out, Brédal found his horse and galloped back—pursued by a swarm of black and torturing thoughts—like a madman to Copenhagen.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Mrs. Bunkeflod came in the next morning with Brédal's coffee, and told him all the gossip of the neighbourhood for the past two months he did not listen to a word. Even the news that his friend Goldberg was going to be married did not succeed in rousing his attention.

The Baron received the dispatches with much apparent pleasure. After he had looked through them he asked where Brédal had ridden so late the night before.

When Brédal hesitated and looked somewhat confused the old man began to laugh heartily, and told him he felt convinced that he was the very person who had frightened them all out of their wits, and given Baron Hansen his slimy bath.

He then went on to tell Brédal that the

Countess from the very first had disbelieved in the thieves theory, and had been extremely angry with Prince Porzio for firing the pistol. As to her engagement, the Baron shrugged his shoulders and said it was very probable, but nothing official had been announced. At any rate he would advise Brédal to reconnoitre the field.

This advice was, however, more easily given than followed, for Brédal had sprained his ankle in jumping, and by midday, it was so swollen and painful that he could not put his foot to the ground. He was confined to the house for a whole fortnight—it seemed interminable to him.

One day Goldberg came in. Brédal said—

"Thank you for coming, Goldberg. I was just reckoning up how long it is since I have seen you. Why haven't you come before?"

"Well, that *is* good," said Goldberg. "And you ask that? But perhaps it is the correct thing to pretend to be offended when

one is one's self in the wrong. I feel particularly peaceful to-day, for which you may thank your lucky stars. If I had met you a month ago, it is more than probable that I should have done my best to punch your head. But what is the matter with your leg? Are you ill, Bredal? 'How fishy looks thy flesh, Romeo?' What's wrong with you?"

Brédal explained that he had sprained his ankle jumping over a ditch.

Goldberg filled his pipe, lighted it, and drew his chair close to Brédal's sofa. Then he said kindlily—

"The Court is sitting, now for the verdict. Defend yourself as best you can. In the meantime, I will ask the defendant where he went that evening on leaving the theatre, where he had had the honour of being taken gratis?"

Brédal flushed hotly.

"I met some of my acquaintances," he said.

"So I saw. Somebody very grand, I dare-say. But I expected you to come back."

"They begged me to remain," said Brédal slowly, and looked down.

"It must be very embarrassing to be in such request," laughed Goldberg.

Brédal was silent for a moment, then he said—

"No—I can't get out of it by telling lies, I will make a clean breast of it. This is the truth—and it is much worse than you imagined. When I saw that box full of people who take an absolutely different view of matters to ourselves, I began to feel ashamed of being seen down there, and—"

"No, wait a bit. Let us call everything by its right name—you began to feel ashamed of your company."

"Well, you can hardly pretend that the two women sitting beside us were very desirable companions to be seen with," said Brédal pettishly.

"Granted—so long as you tell the truth."

"I really will make a clean breast of it. I detested being seen by those people in the pit. I would not, for the whole world, have had the Countess Olfers believe that I had any acquaintance with those two women beside us. I was even such a coward as to deny you—you, my truest and most sincere friend. Unnecessarily too, for I could have amply vindicated myself in the Countess's eyes by denying all acquaintance with the two women. You see I had sufficient courage to sin against our friendship, but not enough to boldly avow the truth, and acknowledge you before them."

Brédal was silent. Goldberg stretched out his hand and said—

"I had a suspicion of all this, and it hurt me. But now, it is all forgiven and forgotten from the bottom of my heart. Where in the world have you been for these eight weeks? They always said you were in

the country, but I didn't believe it. I always imagined that you had left Denmark."

"So I had," answered Brédal.

And then, after pledging him to secrecy, he told him of his mission to Vienna and Metternich.

Mrs. Bunkeflod met Goldberg on the stairs and begged him to come again soon, for she was sure that Brédal was really much worse than he looked, or else she thought he would not be so dreadfully impatient.

"He thinks of nothing but his leg," she said, "and that is always a very bad sign."

Goldberg promised to come again shortly. He was prevented however by business, and our poor Brédal sank deeper than ever into his old depression.

CHAPTER XIV.

As soon as Brédal could go out, he was summoned to the Ambassador's, who was suffering from a sharp attack of gout which was, at any rate, sufficiently bad to give him an excuse for shirking the details of a negotiation with Count Olfers, which seemed as if it never would come to a termination. It had reference to certain claims advanced by Austrian subjects, partly against the Bourbons, partly against private persons in France on account of aid afforded by them during the French Revolution. Count Olfers was the agent of the French Government, and had been sent to come to as advantageous a settlement as possible, and, when this was not practicable, to delay the whole affair *sine die*. He had pursued this policy for so long that Baron von Breitenburg was utterly

wearied out, and merely sent Brédal with a long list of claimants as a matter of form. Count Olfers was the most circumlocuting man under the sun, and anything that once got into his hands never seemed to progress a step further. He had been chosen for his post for this very reason. He could write quires of "report" on the merest trifle, and his manner of speaking was as diffuse as his style of writing. His sentences were enormously long, involved in each other like Chinese boxes, and contained about as little when one had succeeded in unravelling them. He was in consequence the *bête noir* of all the other diplomats. They always laid the blame to the Dutch blood that flowed in his veins. Baron Hansen nicknamed him "Mr. But," and there was certainly no doubt that he always had some objection ready to every proposition.

Brédal soon found this out. After an enormously long introduction, in which the

Count cited every possible precedent, they came to the affair itself. Ten days elapsed however without its moving a step towards settlement. In his despair, Brédal hurried over to take council with Baron von Breitenburg, who received him as a gouty old gentleman is apt to do when he does not want to be worried with business matters.

"You must make haste and finish the affair, it is quite simple, etc., etc.," was all the satisfaction Brédal could obtain.

The Baron, however, assured him each time that his fortune would be made if he could succeed in bringing the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

Brédal rushed home again, and pondered over and over the notes given to him by Count Olfers, but he could not even guess at their meaning. At last he flung them down in disgust, and ordered his horse. "I am a fool to worry myself over all this nonsense," he thought. "I haven't breathed any fresh

air for six days. For nearly a week those confounded Austrian claims have chained me to Copenhagen. What have I to do with these cursed bills? It is this petty, cheese-paring policy that makes diplomats so trivial and prosaic. Confound Diplomacy!"

The evening was beginning to close in. There is no more lovely road than that which runs along by the sea, when the evening dews have laid the dust, and the leaves and flowers begin to breathe again after the heat of the day has passed.

Silence reigned everywhere. The roll of carriages had ceased, and lights began to gleam cheerily from the villas and country houses round. It was dusk, but only dark enough to render the dim outlines mysterious and undefined. The noise of several carriages approaching in front woke Brédal to realities. They drove rapidly past, but he recognised Count Olfers, and Baron Hansen. The Count was driving into Copenhagen to commence

work betimes on the terrible Austrian claims. Next followed a barouche, filled with occupants, of whom Prince Porzio was one. The whole company, in all probability, were returning from the Countess's villa to Copenhagen.

A month had passed since that unfortunate evening when Brédal had seen the Countess, and nearly three months since he had spoken to her. "And all these people can see and speak to her every day," he thought. "Why should they, when I cannot? Has any one of them waited for three months for the completion of a sentence? Why have I waited? To-morrow—to-morrow she shall complete it herself. I will endure this uncertainty no longer."

This determination gave Brédal new life. He had reached the villa. One wing only was still lighted. He could not resist the temptation of entering the garden, but he did not dare to approach the house from

fear of being seen. Turning into one of the side paths, he found a break in the hedge where he could fasten his horse securely.

Around him all was still. The wind did not even rustle the heavily dew-laden leaves. His footsteps fell so lightly that he could hardly hear them himself. His heart beat in dull, quick throbs as he approached a seat half hidden by flowering shrubs. It commanded a magnificent view of the sea. Brédal had almost passed the bushes when he stopped suddenly as if rooted to the ground. In one of the deep recesses formed by the jasmine bushes sat a woman. It was the Countess Olfers. Brédal was incapable of moving a step further. He knelt down before her, and pressed a corner of her dress to his lips. The movement woke the Countess from her abstraction. Her first feeling was fear, the next moment she recognised Brédal. The new moon's rays fell on the imploring yet courageous face she had so often seen in

her dreams. She thought she must still be dreaming with open eyes. Her silence gave Brédal courage.

"Sara!" he cried passionately, "have pity on a madman who has sought in vain for the end of a sentence which you—and you only—can complete, who has only lived since he first saw you. Pity me for loving you so madly that I dare to tell you of it!"

The Countess still remained silent, and covered her eyes with one hand. She leant back, and the other hand, which had tried to wave him away, fell powerless at her side. Brédal seized it in both his own. She made a faint effort to withdraw it, but at last surrendered it to him. He pressed it to his eyes, and covered it with passionate kisses. He no longer knew what he did. He stretched out his arms to her, calling her name over and over again. He pressed a burning kiss on the hand which covered her eyes. It sank, one long look, and, he was kissing her

breathlessly like a starving man into whose mouth bread is put for the first time after a weary fast.

* * * * *

"Tell me again, my darling love," said Brédal, as he knelt before her with her hands playing with his brown curls, "that it is too late to leave you—that you have been unhappy while I was away."

"Have you never felt that my real self was always with you, and could not tear itself from you? How blind you were, Hubert! But tell me, what unfinished sentence have you waited three months for?"

"Can't you recall that evening, Sara, when old Count Lubimoff pronounced *mésalliances* a mistake? The verdict fell like burning iron into my soul. You cannot believe how that word *mésalliance* has martyrised me."

"How often have I told you that the day of *mésalliances* has passed by? Nobody

believes in them except to frighten children with."

"Don't you remember asking me what was the matter with me?"

"Yes; and you said 'Do you not know?' I *did* know, and had known for a long time. And yet when I acknowledged this to you, you went away, and did not come back for such a weary, weary time."

"Then you answered 'But you—do you not know that—' and then you were silent."

"You did not ask me any more, and went away."

"You do not know, Sara, how I suffered on that journey, and how I daily invented new tortures for myself in the completion of that sentence."

"Why did you not ask me at once?" said the Countess. "That sentence might have been completed three months ago."

"Complete it now, Sara, it is all that I want to be entirely happy. You can't

understand how it has haunted me. I shall compel you to complete it, if you will only do so under compulsion." And he pressed her to him until she cried out for mercy.

"'But you—do you not know—'" he whispered.

"Do you not know that I have loved you always?"

"Oh God, Sara, how happy I am! How happy I am that I hear these words for the first time to-night, when I can feel your heart beating against mine, and not three months ago. I should have lost my senses if you had finished the sentence, and I had been obliged to sit quietly and not dared to take you in my arms."

"Hubert, you must go now. It is getting very late, and my people will be coming to look for me. I never stay so late, although I have always spent some time here alone."

"You send me away already!" (with a

world of reproach in the tone). "When shall I see you again?"

The Countess hesitated for a moment, then she said—

"The whole world may know of my love for you, but nobody must guess that I see you here alone, and so late that it is almost night."

"I will forego the happiness of seeing you alone, of being with you. You shall only tell me you love me with your eyes."

"No, I could not live without speaking to you. How can it be managed? Yes! when you see a light shining in that window on the staircase I shall be alone in the garden. But you must only come when you see the light. It shall be the evening star of our love. Go now, my dearest!"

Brédal folded her in his arms.

The Countess spoke of the happiness it would be to meet in society when every word

and every glance would possess a significance suspected by nobody.

"The sound of your voice, my darling, is all-sufficient, and when I dare venture so close to you as to feel your breath upon my cheek—no, I dare not, or I shall betray what makes me so unspeakably happy."

"Go now. I will stay here until the last echoes of your horse's hoofs have died away. Remember our star! When that shines we shall see each other again."

Brédal kissed her once more, and then left her. As he rode past the garden, he could just see her white dress gleaming through the trees.

Brédal's ride home seemed like a happy dream. The night passed in still happier anticipations.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Austrian negotiations did not seem half so irksome to Brédal now, although they did not progress a step nearer settlement. His work with Count Olfers became less disagreeable to him day by day. At the same time he complained bitterly to the Countess that these negotiations were a misery to him—robbing him of time he would so much rather have spent in thinking of her.

"You will never be a diplomat," said the Countess, "although I believe you would make a passable minister."

"You are quite right. I cannot be double-faced, and that is the Alpha and Omega of a successful diplomat. I am sure I shall never be able to hide my happiness when you are near me. My heart beats to suffocation when I even hear your name mentioned."

"You men are poor weak mortals," said the Countess smiling, as she played with his dark curls, "and yet you boast of your superior strength, and look down upon us because our muscles are weaker."

"Nature has been dreadfully unfair," answered Brédal, "and treated us in a most step-motherly fashion. She has given us physical strength, like a plaything for troublesome boys. But on her better-loved children she has bestowed a much more enviable gift —control over their own and others' souls."

"For this very reason, I think Diplomacy ought to be left to us women. At any rate, there ought to be a lady at every Legation. An Ambassador ought never to be unmarried. How many scrapes an Ambassadress has succeeded in getting her Legation out of!"

To all outward appearance, Brédal had not even visited the Countess since his return. Baron von Breitenburg and Prince Porzio both believed that his penchant for her had

passed away. The Baron was confirmed in this supposition by Brédal's answer, given with well-assumed indifference, when he proposed driving him out to visit the Olfers—"That he had no time to devote to visiting until the Austrian claims were settled." The Baron laughed, and praised his application. He then told him Count Olfers' opinion of him, viz., "That he was the most obstinate and pig-headed young man he had ever had the misfortune to come across."

Brédal had in the meantime ridden out many times in the hope of finding his star shining, but had always returned disappointed. At last, one evening the friendly light gleamed through the trees. There was a sense of serenity in the clear, steady flame. He fastened up his horse, and ran up the narrow path. The Countess was already at the trysting place.

"Oh, Sara, my darling, how I have longed for you!"

"And I for you. But I did not dare to yield to this longing before. My brother did not go to town, and the Marechâle was so delighted with your lovely summer nights that she would not go to bed."

"And I have almost cursed them because they kept me away from you. How I long for autumn!"

"How unreasonable you are! What can be more delicious than these clear summer nights? Just look how lovely everything seems! That is the only thing my dear Spain does not possess. If it had such nights, I could not imagine heaven itself lovelier than Spain. If it were dark, I could not look into your eyes."

"I should have to take you into my arms that you might feel what my eyes tell you now, Sara," said Brédal pressing the Countess closely to him.

She endeavoured to free herself.

"Let me go, dearest, let me go. I shall

repent having acknowledged how dear you are to me."

"Could you repent it? Could you really wish to recall the end of that sentence?" implored Brédal.

"Yes—to repeat it to you again. Now that you know that I love you, I feel so poor, as if I had nothing more to give you."

Brédal bent over her, and whispered a few words. The Countess closed his lips with her hand, and compelled him to be silent.

"I will not listen to you. As a punishment, I will talk of nothing but the Austrian claims. How are you progressing?"

"Sara, how can you be so cruel?"

"Is my brother still so difficult to convince?"

Brédal broke forth in to a jeremiade against the negotiations.

"I am sure I shall have to give them up. They are not a bit nearer the end than ever."

The Countess smiled.

"I have been putting myself into your shoes," she said; "as I could not see you, I have amused myself by writing to you. Look." and she showed him several closely-written sheets of paper tied together. "What do you think I have here? Love letters? Outpouring of grief at my lover's absence? No, indeed, nothing but Diplomacy, the rough draft of a settlement which can be completed without anyone having a suspicion of my interference. You will admire my Diplomatic genius, and if these few leaves should procure you an Order, you shall kneel humbly at my feet while I tie it in your button-hole. Then the usual thing will happen—the reward will be given to the person who has not earned it."

Some little time later the Countess said—

"When you have not seen a signal for two days, come and pay me, or the Marechâle, a formal visit. Then I shall be certain of seeing you every third day at least. Of course

you will come to my and the Marechâle's receptions. I shall find some way of speaking to you in our own language."

"My darling, what a sin it is that we did not know each other long ago. Think of all the time we have lost!"

"There are the first faint streaks of morning light. *Haja de mi alma*," she whispered as she kissed him. "You must learn Spanish, Hubert. I will teach it to you, and give you all the loving names my mother used to call me. *Haja de mi alma.* 'Thou child of my soul.' Does it not sound doubly as loving in Spanish? And you must teach me Danish that I may understand your splendid old songs 'Ridder Aage og Jomfru Else,' and 'Liden Gundvser, soom ganger saa seent udi Quel.' Don't laugh at me because I pronounce so badly. I shall learn it in time if you will have patience with me."

Brédal kissed the hesitating words from her lips.

"My love—my love!" he whispered.

When Brédal reached home, the sun had risen. He opened the papers the Countess had given him. They entirely converted him to the belief that Diplomacy ought to be left to women. Each individual claim had been most carefully weighed and considered, and the most impartial justice meted out. He worked the whole morning on a deed based on Sara's sketch, grudging every alteration he was obliged to make to bring the whole into the requisite form. At last he had completed a voluminous document, and, for the first time, worked at the subject without counting the hours.

The Countess had divided the claimants into three sections. The first consisted of about a dozen persons, mentioned by name, who were to receive prompt compensation for their losses. This division consisted mainly of persons of the lower class. The second

consisted of persons of the upper class, who were to receive compensation in the course of five years. The third section comprised the whole of the remaining claimants, who were to be compensated during the course of the following ten years.

The Countess had evidently made herself thoroughly conversant with the interminably long list of claimants, and had considered the merits of each individual case.

Having refreshed himself by a bath, Brédal hurried off to Count Olfers. His exciting and sleepless night had put him into such a fever that even the Count noticed it.

He unfolded and read Brédal's document with his accustomed deliberate coolness, point by point.

Bredal was chagrined to find that the outcome of the Countess's and his own labours did not make the faintest impression on the cool-headed old diplomat. He even imagined he

perceived a half-repressed smile at the enthusiasm with which the cause of the claimants was pleaded.

When the Count reached the classification, however, his face brightened. He read it carefully through several times, nodded his head most contentedly, and looked at Brédal with some admiration. He then expressed his satisfaction at finding him on the right path at last.

Brédal seized his opportunity, and pleaded the cause of the poorer claimants with a warmth that eventually carried the Count with him.

"The first class is chosen with special discretion," said the Count, as he offered Brédal a pinch of snuff. "The choice is really excellent. I cannot thank you enough for this proposition. We will have the deed based upon it at once. I shall certainly recommend you to the favourable notice of my august Master. His Majesty will not fail to

recognise such promising talent in so young a diplomat."

He then invited Brédal to stay to breakfast with him, during which they discussed some of the minor points.

When he took leave, Olfers pressed his hand, and said—

"M. de Brédal, you are a charming young man. I hope you will often do me the pleasure of coming to see me in the country."

Half intoxicated with success, champagne, and love, Brédal hurried home, and threw himself on his bed to rest, and endeavour to realize all that had happened to him. Utterly worn out, he soon fell into a long, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Brédal went to see Baron von Breitenburg in the afternoon, he found that Olfers had already been trumpeting his praises. The Baron was delighted with his favourite's success, and could not congratulate him enough on his splendid solution of the difficulty. Brédal began to feel sharp pricks of conscience at the unmerited praise showered upon him from all sides.

"And now we will set to work at once. Everything must be completed by this evening. The duplicates must be signed and sealed, and to-morrow, my young friend, to-morrow you must leave for Vienna, and deliver the fruits of your industry with your own hands."

Brédal absolutely gasped. Such a fatal consequence of his triumph had never

occurred to him as possible. The bare idea of a second journey to Vienna so dumbfounded him that he did not hear a word of all the plans the Baron went on making for his future promotion. It was a long time before he succeeded in persuading the Baron to relinquish the idea. The old man got very impatient at what he called his "obstinacy," and until Brédal, as a last resource, pleaded his want of health—induced by overwork—as an excuse for not undertaking the journey, he would not give way an inch. Brédal's thin cheeks, with their hectic flush, and his brilliant eyes, surrounded by their tell-tale dark rings, gave the semblance of probability to this plea. The Baron's tender solicitude for his favourite gave Brédal a bitter pang of remorse for the deceit he was practising.

The whole day was spent in compiling the deed, superintended by the Baron and Count Olfers.

The constant squabbling over minor and totally unimportant details between these two old diplomats was excessively comic. Brédal had not finished work until late at night, and his hope of seeing the Countess was wrecked on the Diplomatic rocks.

The next day Brédal went to call upon the Marechâle, but she had just driven out with the Countess. He returned in a most depressed frame of mind to Copenhagen, where he dawdled about until he met Baron Hansen, who was in an evident state of perturbation at the Marquis de Mirecourt's return from Stockholm. He evidently looked upon him as a formidable rival in the Countess's good graces.

The news was not over welcome to Brédal, who foresaw that de Mirecourt's presence at the villa would render his meetings with the Countess doubly difficult.

Count Olfers drove by soon after Hansen left him, and offered him a seat. The Count

was still in ecstasies over the completion of the inventory of the claimants. He spoke with his usual verbosity, and Brédal soon found that it was quite unnecessary to do anything but listen.

Olfers was delighted at finding such an apparently attentive auditor. While he was involving himself in one of his impenetrable labyrinths of argument, Brédal's thoughts had travelled miles away, and were only recalled when he found that the Count was waiting for an affirmative nod to start off again.

When the carriage stopped, there was no end to the mutual compliments on "lucid explanations" and "flattering attention." The Countess was sitting at the window working. She had time to recover from her astonishment during her brother's elaborate introduction of Brédal. As soon as the door closed behind the Count, Brédal knelt down beside her and kissed her hand.

"My darling," he said, "here at your feet I lay my undeserved laurels, which I have only won through you. What should I be without you? When shall you be able to see me in the garden again, dearest?"

"What are you afraid of, Hubert? A Spanish woman is not bound by all the petty chains that stifle other people—and I am a Spaniard body and soul, I feel it now. Until now I have never known what love meant, and you have taught me. My mother was a Spaniard, and although French blood flows in my veins, it was acclimatized in Spain, where I spent the greater part of my life. You know I was almost a child when I was married. They took me from the convent, dressed me in fine clothes, gave me plenty of money to make presents to my school-fellows, and scolded me because I cried at the idea of marrying a grandee old enough to be my father. I was married and widowed on the same day. Soon after, the Lady Superioress

of the convent came to see my mother. They had been intimate friends in their youth. I was in the next room, and could hear every word. The Lady Superioress reproached my mother for having married me to the old Count Joantho. My mother was of opinion that she had done very well for me. I was now young, rich, and free.

"'Heaven has been more merciful than you,' said the Lady Superioress. 'What would have become of Sara if he had lived?'

"My mother persisted that even this would have been no such very great misfortune.

"The Lady Superioress then became very angry, and said—

"'Fernanda, Fernanda, have you so entirely forgotten your own youth? Have you forgotten that you were once young, and *loved?* How could you have answered your child if she had accused you of selling her heart while

it slumbered? The love of a Spanish woman is an unquenchable fire. She lives wholly in, and for her love. She sacrifices everything for it—future, fame, life itself. She surrenders herself heart and soul with an implicit and boundless confidence. Her whole soul is merged in love. A Spaniard loves once only, or she is no true Spaniard. Have you forgotten all this, Fernanda? Must I come out of my dark cell to remind you of what ought long since to have been eradicated from my heart?'

"My mother cried bitterly, and was much overcome by these reproaches.

"The Lady Superioress did not leave her until she had exacted a solemn promise never to influence me again, but to leave me entirely free choice.

"This conversation made a powerful impression on me," continued the Countess after a pause; "I could just see the slender figure of the Lady Superioress in her con-

ventual dress through the half-open door. She, who had counselled me so severely; she, whom, in my childish simplicity, I had always imagined rather unfavourably disposed towards me—she was the only person who had my real interest at heart. This then was love—this all-absorbing passion, powerful and terrible in its consequences. It must be true, or the Lady Superioress would not have pictured it so vividly. My own position frightened me, and the possibility of forgetting my mother, my little playfellows, and all that I had known so long for a man whom I had never seen seemed to me an appalling fate."

Brédal had been sitting on the arm of the Countess's chair, and had never once moved his eyes from her face.

Smiling up to him, she laid her cheek on his knee, and said—

"By degrees my fear disappeared, but it created an ideal which has always stood before

me like a shield. Now I know that the Superioress was right, and I daily bless her as the guardian angel of our love."

Brédal slipped off the chair and buried his face in her lap in silence.

The sound of an opening door came from the adjoining room. Brédal sprang up. The Countess went on working as if he were the most indifferent person in the world to her.

The Marechâle entered, accompanied by several ladies and gentlemen.

Brédal could not endure the restraint of remaining in company, and, as soon as he decently could, slipped through the window into the garden.

When he returned the card tables had been placed. Sara was speaking to Prince Porzio and de Mirecourt. She was standing at first with her back to the window, then she half turned round. He fancied she looked somewhat pale and depressed. Suddenly, how-

ever, her face brightened, and flushed faintly. She had recognised his step. Brédal stood leaning against the window.

The Marechâle complained of heat. The Countess opened the door into the adjoining room, rang for lights, and sat down in her old chair.

As she passed Brédal their eyes met. He passed into the next room. A door, leading into a corridor, lighted only by a small lamp, stood open. At the other end of the corridor was a large room, it was the Countess's bedroom.

Brédal stood motionless on the threshold as if the sudden change from light to darkness had dazzled him. He took the first few steps as if he were in a sanctuary. The window was half open. A jasmine bush almost pushed through it, and filled the room with its delicious perfume. The soft evening wind beat its branches against the window, as if imploring for admittance. In the

far distance a gleaming light shone over the sea. The bench in the garden was plainly visible, and the room could be entered from the garden. Brédal's joy at recognising all these witnesses of his happiness almost overpowered him. He looked at and touched everything. He leant over her bed and kissed her pillow. He even dared to lay his head down, and remained a long time absolutely motionless. A volume of poems lay on the table. He opened it, and found jasmine leaves inserted at the Countess's favourite lines. He marked several others with leaves. Then he pricked Sara's name with his scarf pin in a jasmine leaf, and placed it in front of the looking-glass. When he returned to the reception room he felt endowed with new life and strength. He was like a pious Mussulman who, having accomplished his pilgrimage to Mecca, was returning, refreshed and invigorated, through the desert to his home.

No one had remarked his absence but the Countess.

He joined the conversation, and was the most amusing and agreeable of the men present. He even possessed sufficient strength of mind to devote himself exclusively to the Marechâle.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GRAND dinner, at which Brédal had been unspeakably bored, was given to the members of the Corps Diplomatique by Count Olfers at his hotel in Copenhagen.

The company separated after dinner to meet again at the Countess's reception room at the villa.

The Countess was trying her best to amuse a room full of ladies; no easy matter, for the Marechâle had committed the social enormity of endeavouring to make a scene in consequence of a reported duel fought by Count Mechlenberg.

Lady Malden whispered smilingly to the Countess, "Of all animals to choose for a tame cat, a duellist must certainly be the most dangerous!"

The Countess implored her by a look to *say no* more.

The Marechâle raised her head and said, "I am convinced that Mechlenberg is in the right. How I hate that Swinton! I never could endure that man. You must acknowledge that he looks like a murderer!"

"On the contrary," returned Lady Malden, "he is a most amiable person, and as peaceable as he looks. I cannot understand how he could be in the wrong in a duel."

Baron Hansen now entered. He had met a man after dinner who had just arrived from Pyrmont, and had brought all the particulars of the duel with him.

"Oh, Baron Hansen," cried the Marechâle, "I am sure Count Mechlenberg is seriously wounded!"

"Not in the least; Count Mechlenberg is on the road to recovery. He was certainly wounded, but not at all dangerously—shot in the arm, that is all."

"And that detestable Swinton, I hope he is dead?"

"No, not even wounded."

"What a crying injustice; it is dreadful!" repeated the Marechâle over and over again.

Hansen then went on to say that the duel had arisen out of a letter to a lady. (At these words the Marechâle dried her eyes.) The lady in question had inadvertently enclosed a letter of Count Mechlenberg's in a parcel to another lady. In this letter he turned Swinton into ridicule, and said some very hard things about him.

"Good heavens, what an unpardonable *bêtise*!" cried Lady Malden.

This letter had somehow or other fallen into Swinton's hands. He was too badly spoken of in it to let the matter pass, and he made up his mind to challenge the Count. When he was on the point of doing this, however, the Count asked him some considerable personal favour. Swinton granted the request, and postponed the duel. A few days later he took the letter to Mechlenberg

and demanded a written retraction and apology. Mechlenberg refused; Swinton then challenged him; Mechlenberg fired and missed; Swinton shot him through the arm. After the duel Swinton had looked after Mechlenberg with all possible care, and the whole of Pyrmont was unanimous in lauding his conduct to the skies.

"But does no one know who the lady is who behaved so idiotically?" asked the Marechâle.

Hansen looked the picture of embarrassment, and did not answer for a few seconds. At last he said—

"This lady—er—in fact—er—this lady—was yourself, Madame la Marechâle!"

"I?" she cried; "I?"

"You enclosed the letter in a parcel of lace you sent to the Countess von Glehn. She is staying at Pyrmont, and the letter accidentally fell into Swinton's hands."

"I? Well, it is not impossible. I must

acknowledge Mr. Swinton behaved very generously and well. Does he return to the Legation this winter, Lady Malden? You must bring him to me without fail. He and Mechlenberg must be friends."

Count Olfers now came in, and was on the point of recapitulating the whole of the affair, *da capo*, when the Marechâle cried—

"Oh, for pity's sake spare us, Count! Nothing is so dreadful as a second edition of horrors."

Brédal had left the garden room, where the company was assembled, and entered the corridor leading to the Countess's bedroom. The door stood open. Although it was quite light outside, the room was enveloped in semi-darkness, the curtains being half drawn.

He threw himself down on the little sofa. Beside him lay the shawl which the Countess had worn the first night he had surprised her on the bench. A mitten on the dressing-

table also spoke to him. One evening as he was trying to get it off her hand it tore, and he had carried away the other half with him. A sprig of jasmine was in a glass of water, a few books lay on the table. Brédal looked them through, and at last found a sheet of paper in "Romeo and Juliet."

It was a pencil sketch of the seat in the garden. The new moon was just peeping through the clouds. The Countess had evidently expected him to look for and find this token. He could not resist stealing it. It had lain between the pages containing Juliet's beautiful reply to Romeo in the the second act—"Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face," etc.

Brédal read this message of love sent him through the old poet. On the frame of the mirror he found a leaf with the word "midnight" pricked in it. His heart beat doubly quick when he had deciphered this "open sesame" to happiness. He searched

long for an answer. At last he marked with a jasmine leaf Romeo's farewell to Juliet—

> Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy heart;
> Would I were sleep, and peace, so sweet to rest.

At this moment he heard the voice of the Countess's maid. He hastily threw down the book and vaulted into the garden. The door at once opened, and a stream of light carried by those entering proved to him what a narrow escape he had had.

In a few minutes he re-entered the garden-room. The Countess flushed vividly, and looked shyly down as their eyes met. She sat near the Marechâle, who was engaged in placing little pieces of ivory together to form different patterns.

Brédal stood behind the Marechâle's chair. As he bent over her he took out the jasmine leaf and kissed it. The Countess saw him and laughingly threatened him with her finger.

The Marquis de Mirecourt and the Colonel, who had given Hansen the news from Pyrmont, were announced.

The Countess rose and advanced to meet them. The Marechâle did not look up. She was trying to place the little ivory squares so as to form a heart.

The Privy Councillor came up to her and said—

"Madame la Marechâle, the gentleman now speaking to Count Olfers, is the Hanoverian, Colonel Burton; he has come direct from Pyrmont."

"*Fort bien, mon ami*," she replied; "will you be so good as to look at my heart? It *is* so difficult to get straight."

Brédal could not help laughing heartily. The Marechâle said—

"You are laughing, M. de Brédal, because my heart has so many corners. But can you do better? Do try!"

Brédal sat down beside her and began to

place the little blocks of ivory; she was delighted beyond measure at his want of success. The Privy Councillor began again—

"I think Colonel Burton is very anxious for an introduction to you, Madame d'Aubigny."

"He is very welcome—any time—tomorrow if he wishes. You will never get a heart that way, M. de Brédal. Mon Dieu! now you have disturbed mine. How *did* I lay it?"

Lady Malden now came up and said—

"Will you not see Colonel Burton whom you were so anxious to meet?"

"Yes; I really believe M. de Brédal can lay better figures than I. Do help me, or I shall never succeed in making a heart; I am almost defeated."

"Does that game really amuse you?" asked Lady Malden.

"Immensely. Oh! now I have it. Bravo, that is a heart!"

"Looks much more like a needle-case," remarked Baron Hansen, who stood looking on. "It may be a very good imitation of a heart for all that, I don't deny."

"Your heart is no good at all, my friend," said the Countess, who had just returned. "Your opponent has a much better one. Just look!"

Brédal did not dare to look up. His hands trembled so much that the little squares of ivory were displaced.

Mdlle. d' Aubigny laid her hand on her mother's shoulder and said—

"Mama, Colonel Burton has seen Mechlenberg. He lost all his luggage at Lübeck, as he was going on board ship, and came here almost in his dressing-gown."

The Marechâle rose, and threw the ivory blocks together saying—

"Bah! it is really a stupid game after all. Where is Colonel Burton?"

The company separated at the usual hour.

De Mirecount drove with the Count to Copenhagen, Brédal rode with Hansen; they had a race back. Brédal bade him good-night at the door of his hotel, and after making a détour, rode quickly back to the villa.

He fastened up his horse as usual, and was the first to arrive at the bench. It was a sultry August night, the sky began to grow darker, and the stars shone brilliantly. Lights still burned in several windows, but one by one they were extinguished until Sara's only remained.

A moment later, the window softly opened, and she appeared in the same dress she had worn during the evening.

Brédal stood looking at her for a moment as if he did not dare to approach her in all that glory. Then he took her into his arms and whispered—

"How lovely you are, Sara! But I don't like all this grandeur. I love you best in that clinging white gown."

"Am I not always Sara for you?" she asked, as she clasped her arms round his neck.

"Sara, my dearest, leave your window unbarred to me. You do not know how inexpressibly happy I have felt in your room. Let me renew that happiness with you, my darling—the burthen is too great to be borne alone. The nights are too cold for you on this seat."

The Countess closed the French window, and said—

"You exacting mortal! Soon even that would not satisfy you. Have you got tired already of our bench, Hubert? How unthankful! Come—we can be seen here, we shall be safer on the seat. You traitor, with your false anxiety for my health! The evening air is so mild and warm."

Brédal threw his arms round her, and half carried her to the bench.

"How you startled me to-night, Sara, by

comparing my heart to the Marechâle's. If you do that again, I shall not answer for the consequences, I shall throw myself at your feet before the whole world."

"I did it to punish you for not hiding my jasmine leaf better. I almost repented though."

"Never mind—you made me so happy. I am afraid I shall sin again to be punished by you, Sara."

The Countess spoke of the company of that evening.

"Do you know I have become so much more observant since I have known you, Hubert?"

"Me, who see and hear nothing when you are present?"

"Yes—you. We women are only half educated, and numbers of things escape us until a man influences our judgment by his superior experience, and leads our thoughts into new channels."

"And the Marechâle, with her four-

cornered heart, which Hansen said was like a needle-case," said Brédal. "How can you account for such a phenomenon as that?"

"She is not a phenomenon at all, only a woman of fashion, and as superficial and ephemeral as any summer mode. In reality, she is a good woman, and has brought up a charming daughter."

"But she is not capable of any intensity of feeling."

"I don't agree with you," said the Countess, "she is very lenient in her judgment, and quite sincere—that is to say, as long as one is alone with her. Don't you know what Fontenelle says, that where this leniency of judgment and mercy exist in elderly women, one can be pretty sure that '*l'amour avait passé pas la*,' and I think he is right."

"You are such a charming wiseacre, Sara. Teach me. You don't know how ignorant I am."

"Yes, in Diplomacy," said the Countess

smiling, and reminded him of an unguarded answer he had given her brother that very evening. "Fortunately, he looks upon you as a Diplomatic genius, and, as such, not to be held accountable for occasional indiscretions."

Brédal was playing with her hand, and kissed it. Her shawl slipped back, and his eyes fell upon a very magnificent diamond necklace. He touched it and said—

"Sara, when I see you so lovely, and possessing so much, and yet hold you in my arms, I can hardly realise that I am so far beneath those others who have tried to win you. Let me always see you in your simple white dress—which does not remind me every moment of the danger of losing you. In that alone, I really feel that you are entirely my own."

"What nonsense, Hubert, to pretend that you have taken such a hatred to my poor dress. Look at the state it is in, and then

tell me if you have more respect for silk than muslin. You know, only too well, that I am the same Sara in every dress. And what 'others' do you mean? Have I ever given you any 'others' to complain of?"

"I worship you, my darling, but my love does not make me blind. These others can offer you a position and fortune in accordance with your own, while I have nothing—nothing. Oh, my love, dare I love you? Ought I not to leave you? I can never attain what you are worthy of."

The Countess laid her cool hand on his burning head.

"Are you not my lover, Hubert? What power in the world could separate us? Do you not know how dear, how inexpressibly dear you are to me? Must I repeat it to you again?"

"Sara, you misunderstand me."

"No, I do not misunderstand you. I know the struggle there is in your heart. And now

you must understand me. There must be no shadow between us."

The Countess put her arm round his neck and leant her head on his breast.

For the first time she spoke of her rank, her fortune. She offered him her hand. She was rich enough for both. What pleasure were her fortune and independence except to give into his keeping? They would go to Spain. She possessed an estate in one of the most beautiful mountain districts, not far from Seville. There they would create their home, and live in, and for each other.

Brédal listened with silent delight.

As she ended, he gently raised her head, and looked long and lovingly into her eyes—they were full of tears. He kissed them softly away, and enclosed her in his arms, murmuring the tenderest words of love.

"You will, my dearest, you will?" she continued tremblingly, "you will go with me to Spain, you will not refuse to share my

fate? Why do you not answer me, Hubert?"

Brédal was silent; it was the triumph of his pride. Then tenderly and softly he told her that the thought of being dependent on his wife was unbearable to him. A man must be self dependent, and able to earn his own bread. He would leave the Diplomatic service, and enter the army. If he lived he would make himself worthy of her.

The Countess sobbed bitterly.

"And you could leave me!"

"My God, Sara, no, I cannot!" he cried, and threw his arms round her as if to defend her from himself.

The Countess took his hands in both of hers. He could count the warm tears falling.

Suddenly a bell from the house rang out into the silence of the night. Brédal started up. The bell still continued ringing violently.

"That is the Marechâle's bell," cried the

Countess. "Good Heavens, Hubert, look, all the sky is as black as ink. Oh, what a flash!"

Unheeded by the lovers, a storm had been brewing over their heads. There had been several distant growls of thunder. Now it rolled nearer, and the lightning was blinding.

There seemed a great commotion in the house. The Marechâle and her daughter were both dreadfully afraid of storms, and rang their bells unceasingly. Rain began to fall in heavy, hot drops. Brédal carefully wrapped the shawl round the Countess, and they reached the long French window opening into her bedroom. She stood still, and said—

"What a fearful storm! What will become of you, Hubert? Listen how the wind howls through the trees. Must the thirteenth of August always bring us danger? Have you forgotten that it is a year to-day since I saw you for the first time? Exactly

a year ago to-day you were ready to die with me or save me. I cannot tell you what I felt when you came to my side. It was like your heart speaking to mine." She leaned against the window which had been blown half open by the wind.

"My dearest, I have celebrated the birthday of our love without knowing it. Since I have known you all measurement of time has ceased."

A loud clap of thunder broke over their heads. The Countess stepped nearer him, and said—

"Where shall I hide you, Hubert, while this storm lasts? God will pardon my weakness. When you entreated me I was strong, and withstood you. Now, Heaven itself compels me."

Brédal drew her closely to him, and, kissing her passionately, whispered—

"Will you give me a refuge in that dear little room, where everything speaks to me

of you? Come, Sara, do not let us lose one of these precious moments that I may spend with you!"

The Countess, overpowered, leant her head on his shoulder. Her voice almost failed as she whispered—

"Merciful Heaven, I must!"

At this moment a dazzling flash of lightning illumined the darkness which surrounded them. By its light Brédal also saw the Countess's deathly pale face; it was quivering with conflicting emotions. Brédal knelt down before her, and while the thunder was still echoing in the distance, he said—

"No Sara, I have still strength for self-control. I will leave you, my darling; don't be uneasy about me, I shall find shelter. Good-night, my love; my love, good-night!"

The Countess leant against the window, incapable of reply. He kissed her lips passionately once. An instant later she was alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Brédal found his horse had broken loose, but he had not strayed far. When they reached home Brédal was drenched to the skin.

Early the next morning he hurried to pay a visit to the Marechâle, and to make personal enquiries after both ladies.

Madame d'Aubigny was quite eloquent in her description of the terror of the previous night. She had never been so much frightened in her life, and was still in a high fever, although she had taken more than a dozen soothing draughts. When she was first awakened by the thunder, she had sprung up to ring the bell. Heaven and earth were a sheet of flame. The wind had howled like an enormous æolian harp, and she had distinctly seen white shapes flittering about the garden. They had extended what seemed

like large white wings, as if about to take flight, and at that moment it had lightened and thundered as if it were the Last Day.

The Countess laughed very heartily at this description, which, however, brought such a burning flush to her face and neck that her transparent white morning gown seemed quite illumined by the glow.

The Marechâle was delighted with Brédal's attention at calling. She did not dream for an instant that it had been paid to another person.

Tea was then brought out on the terrace. The storm had refreshed all nature. The trees were washed free from dust, and the grass was like a bright green carpet. The sun shone, and not a cloud was to be seen. The sea lay before them calm and blue, dotted over with innumerable white-winged ships. After some conversation, the Marechâle left to give her orders for the day.

When she had gone, and Brédal was alone

with Sara at the pretty little tea table, with the urn steaming away, the little scene seemed most delightfully homelike and charming to him. He said so to the Countess, and she answered—

"Yes, Hubert, we could sit so in the morning before our house, and could see Seville in the far distance, and the ships gleaming on the Guadalquivir, which flows close by our door." She put her work in her lap, and placed her hand in his under the table—

"You must have got wet last night. My pillow was wet with tears. I cried almost the whole night long—not from grief, but anxiety about you, my dearest, and, I think, from joy and gratitude that you left me."

As the Countess ceased speaking, an intense, burning blush rose over her face and bosom, and she leant her head low down as if endeavouring to hide it from him.

Brédal pressed her hands to his lips. The

Countess drew back quickly, and glanced up at the house as if dreading observant eyes.

The Marechâle, with her daughter, returned, and proposed a stroll along the seashore. Mdlle. d'Aubigny collected a lap full of flat pebbles to ricochet over the water. The Countess and she then tried whose stone would rebound the oftenest. Mdlle. d'Aubigny named all hers. "There's Samarow! There goes Hansen—magnifique! Saltihoff—bah how stupid! De Mirecourt—just look what splendid leaps! Porzio—right down to the bottom; M. de Brédal—down too! Oh, M. de Brédal, I expected better things of you!"

The Marechâle had been afraid of getting her dress splashed, and was sitting down a little distance off; she called to her daughter, and the Countess availed herself of the moment to impress the greatest caution on Brédal.

Her maid had not gone to bed the night

before, and had, in all probability, heard their voices. At any rate, the Countess had imagined her to have looked most inquisitive and suspicious that morning.

Sara begged him not to come again for some time to the garden. She could not endure the idea of making a confidante of her maid.

Brédal promised, but could not help saying what a sacrifice it would be to him.

"And to me, Hubert. I dare not tell you how I long for you."

The mother and daughter rejoined them.

Brédal accompanied them home, and did not arrive in town until mid-day.

He found several important business affairs awaiting him.

He transacted them, but badly, however, for all his thoughts were at the villa on the sea-shore.

CHAPTER XIX.

Brédal had not seen the Countess alone for a whole month. He had often ridden round the house at night, and did not leave until every light had disappeared. During this time he had regularly accompanied the Baron to Madame d' Aubigny's, and the Countess's receptions.

Sara had generally contrived to give him a few crumbs of consolation to feed upon lest he should become entirely destitute, but the door of her bedroom was never again left open.

One evening, Baron von Breitenburg made some remark with reference to Byron's poetry.

"I have never read anything of his," said Sara, "I have been reading more Danish than English lately."

Everybody looked quite astonished, as if

the possibility of a Danish literature occurred to them for the first time.

The Countess praised the soft music of the language; she thought one of its greatest peculiarities was the poetry being as easy to understand as the prose. She cited as an example a scene from Oehlenschläger's "Axel and Walborg," which, after much study, she had become entire mistress of. She then went on to say that in Northern poetry, love was almost invariably represented as an ideal sentiment, capable of complete self-abnegation, and an eternity of affection when it had outlived its earthly career.

De Mirecourt thought that love was probably a good deal affected by climate, and, in Denmark, would be very likely to acquire a chilly tendency. Everyone had something to say *pro* and *con*, then the Countess added—

"It is not coldness, the flame burns clear and bright."

As she replaced the book in a little hanging book-shelf over Brédal's head she whispered—

"So will our souls love in a better life."

The Privy Councillor said—

"What an immense advantage it is to diplomats to understand all languages—even the most barbarous. Unfortunately, I don't speak Danish. Not very long ago, I was in the company of two gentlemen, who, I am morally convinced, were vilifying my Government. Yet of course I couldn't understand a word they said. I can't tell you how annoyed I felt."

"Really," answered Baron von Breitenburg smiling, "were you actually annoyed because you couldn't understand how much you were abused?"

When they took leave the Countess said "Buona sera" to Prince Porzio, and "God nat" to Brédal. It did not escape the jealous Italian that the Danish farewell was spoken in a much warmer tone than the Italian.

Baron von Breitenburg seemed to be of the same opinion, for as they were driving home he said somewhat quizzically to Brédal—

"The Countess is evidently applying herself '*con amore*' to the Danish language."

CHAPTER XX.

One morning Brédal was summoned to the Baron at an unusual hour. The old man wore all his Orders. He received Brédal with unwonted ceremony. With a mixture of kindliness and diplomatic dignity he said—

"In consequence of my representation to His August and Imperial Majesty, my great Master, of the important services rendered by you to the State in connection with the Austrian claims against the French Government, and the successful issue to which you have brought a much vexed question, he has been pleased to confer upon you, as an especial mark of His August and Imperial favour, the cross of the Order of Leopold."

The Baron then added a few friendly words expressing the great pleasure it gave him to bestow this honour on his favourite. He proposed Brédal's driving with him to Count

Olfers, to whom he had to deliver an autograph letter from the Emperor.

Brédal felt as if the whole affair must be a dream. However, when he found himself sitting in the carriage with the Baron, the Order in his button-hole, and the Imperial despatches on the seat in front, he could no longer doubt the reality of affairs.

Count Olfers had previously received notice of this visit, and he and his retinue were all in gala attire. The Ambassador descended from the carriage followed by Brédal, who carried the portefeuille. Napoleon did not feel prouder at that celebrated audience when eight kings bent before him, than did Count Olfers on this occasion.

After a few introductory remarks from the Ambassador, the Imperial letter was delivered. The Count read it, and placed it for safety in a costly despatch box. Then he commenced a speech of thanks, which Brédal thought would never come to an end. The festivity

ended by the health of the two monarchs being drunk out of golden goblets.

The Countess had witnessed the whole ceremony from the adjoining room; Brédal could see her reflection in the mirror. As soon as the two diplomats were engaged in conversation he stole in to her.

Sara was dressed in soft, pale pink, and wore her large diamond cross. A little bouquet of forget-me-nots and jasmine peeped from her bosom. She held out her hand to Brédal; he knelt, and placed the cross in it. She looked at it smiling.

"You see, Sara, you were a true prophetess; the unworthy man has been rewarded."

"Let me dub you my true knight by this token. You shall swear an oath of unswerving fealty to me."

She looked like a queen as she tied the Order in his button-hole.

"We do not care about it ourselves,

Hubert, but still I am glad to see this little cross on your breast."

The Ambassador entered to take leave. During the farewells, Sara managed to whisper "to-night," as she tore a jasmine leaf in half. The glowing flush that rushed into Brédal's face showed that he understood her. He drew back to allow Baron von Breitenburg to precede him out of the room, and quickly stooping down managed to secure the half jasmine leaf, which he placed beside the order in his button-hole.

He was the first to arrive at the seat in the evening. As Sara came silently over the grass in her long white dress, with a black shawl thrown over her head, he told her how like a nun she looked who was going to escape from her convent.

"Why don't you finish the romance, and run away with me? How willingly I would follow you into the wide world!"

She then told him that her brother soon

intended to leave Denmark. He made, as usual, the greatest mystery of the whole affair, and would not allow it to be announced until the eve of his departure.

She did not intend to accompany him to St. Petersburgh, as his stay in the North might be indefinitely prolonged. She could not remain alone in Copenhagen, and had therefore decided to go to Spain—to Seville, where she had passed her childhood.

"And when have you arranged to leave?" asked Brédal, whose voice trembled painfully.

The Countess did not answer; she burst into tears, and hid her face on his shoulder.

The lovers were silent for a long time. At last Brédal said—

"Sara, why have you made me love you? I felt this happy dream could not last."

"And why not continue it in my childhood's home, Hubert?"

"I cannot endure the thought of dragging

you down—that you should lower yourself for my sake."

"How can you wound me so, Hubert? You will not sacrifice an iota of your pride—even to gain my love entirely!"

"Sara!"

"I am pleading to you for the second time, Hubert. I put all pride, everything on one side, except my love for you. I cannot live without you. You said once that you would give up Diplomacy and become a soldier of fortune. Would you rather return a fortunate adventurer than share with me what fate has bestowed on me? Oh, dearest, is it the empty rank that steps in between us and frightens you away? I place no value on this rank. Your love is the sole possession for which I crave."

Brédal bent down and kissed her lovely, pleading face. Then softly, almost in a whisper, he told her of his youth, and the absolute independence of feeling it had

created. He spoke of his own unworthiness and his conviction that the verdict of the world would reach him, even in her arms, and make them both unhappy. The Countess looked down and shook her head. Brédal had at last exhausted all his arguments. As long as he continued speaking they seemed to possess, at least, some weight; when he ceased there was a bitter doubt of having convinced even himself of their validity.

"Hubert," said the Countess, after a long pause, "you must yourself acknowledge that my plea has outweighed yours. You need not be indebted to me for anything. You say you have no sympathy with Diplomacy, and yet you act in the most approved Diplomatic fashion towards yourself, and sacrifice your own and my happiness to an empty form, to which neither of us, in reality, attach the slightest importance. Tell me honestly, am I not right?"

Brédal was silent.

"Suppose blind chance—this same blind chance which is to be allowed to be your only benefactor—suppose it took you under its wing and provided you with an independent position, sufficient to satisfy all your requirements; if this position were offered to you, not for services rendered, not for your own merits in any way, would you accept it for my sake? Can you forget your pride for once in your life, and act like a rational being?"

"I don't understand, Sara. Tell me what you mean."

"It is a long story. Before beginning, however, I should like thoroughly to impress upon you, M. de Brédal, that there is no necessity whatever for my going a-begging in this way for a husband if it did not so please me; for besides humble adorers, I possess quite a number of highly respectable suitors!"

"Be merciful, Sara!"

"Well, to commence in real earnest."

She then told Brédal that she had heard the other day from a friend of hers at Seville that the Italian Consul had just died there.

Prince Porzio had that very same day been indulging in some particularly spiteful remarks apropos of Brédal. To punish him, Sara launched into a panegyric on M. de Brédal's virtues, and wound up by saying that the vacant Consulate at Seville would be just the post for him; he was most anxious to go to Spain, and would be a most useful person, etc., etc.

To her surprise Prince Porzio thoroughly agreed with her. The prospect of so conveniently and permanently getting rid of his rival entranced him, and he said he had only to apply to his Government to obtain the post for Brédal. The matter then dropped, but, a few days later, the Countess was astonished to find that the Prince had employed his powerful interest so energetically as to

actually procure the appointment. The whole affair had been settled without even an application to Brédal.

That very evening the Countess had received a very big letter from the Prince, enclosing Brédal's credentials, accompanied by the order that he was to enter upon his new duties as soon as possible.

At mid-day the Prince arrived to receive her thanks in person. His coarse, boastful manner, added to his ill-concealed delight at getting Brédal safely out of the way, at once stifled any gratitude the Countess may at first have felt, and she simply regarded him as an exceedingly selfish tool in the hands of fate.

The Countess looked at Brédal with a loving smile as she concluded, but her eyes were still overshadowed by anxious fears. Brédal folded his arms and looked at the ground. It was so still a leaf might have been heard falling to the ground.

Sara stretched out her hand to him—

"You do not doubt any longer, Hubert? You will not destroy this hope—my dearest, you *cannot!*"

And seizing his hand she pressed it to her heart that he might feel its quick, loud throbs. He lifted his eyes. Then, throwing both her arms round his neck, she cried, with tears in hers—

"When do we start for Seville, M. le Consul?"

"Oh, Sara, Sara!" cried Brédal, in a half-suffocated voice. He threw himself down before her, clasping her waist with his arms, his whole frame trembled like an aspen leaf.

The Countess laid her hands on his head. Both were incapable of uttering a syllable.

After a long silence they began to speak of their happy future.

Daylight at last began to dawn, and the first lark commenced his song.

"Look, Hubert, day has almost broken,"

said the Countess; "the sun will soon rise on our first happy day. Thousands of others are to follow, Hubert!" and she sang with much vivacity a verse from a little French romance—"Colin, va t'en, voici l'aurore, etc., etc."

"*Adieu sagesse,*" she added, "*le temps de l'amour est arrivé* When shall I see you again, my dearest? We have a thousand things to arrange together. I shall expect you to-morrow night. Good-bye my love."

Brédal moved a few steps away from her, but she held her arms out to him once more, and he pressed her passionately to his heart.

"When shall I be so happy that the morning sun will not drive me from you, Sara—when?"

"Soon, dearest, soon."

Her head sank on his breast, and she whispered—

"We shall soon reach Spain, and then, Hubert, we shall never part again."

"Oh, my darling, how I long for Spain!"

The Countess disengaged herself from his arm, and said—

"Yes!"

Then she made him a most charming little curtsey, saying—

"*Au revoir, M. le Consul!*" At the same moment she ran quickly across the grass to her window.

Brédal walked slowly through the garden. When he reached the hedge, he looked back. She still stood there like a second Isolde, waving her scarf—but it was a signal of parting, not of welcome.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE following evening all the details were arranged. The Countess was an absolutely free agent, and obliged to consult no one. Her brother knew already that she wished to go to Spain. She intended to inform him of her marriage on her arrival; he was too much a man of the world, and a Diplomatist not to accept the irrevocable with a good grace. The Countess preferred going by sea as they could then travel together. They also arranged that Brédal was to pay a visit to Prince Porzio the following day. The Countess laughed heartily when she thought of the Prince's face after he had found out that she had left for Spain. She had thoroughly realised that "*les beaux yeux de sa cassette*" had been the real inspiration of his passion. Both she and Brédal agreed

that the Baron von Breitenburg and Goldberg ought to know of their intentions.

When Brédal went the next morning to Prince Porzio, he made no attempt to disguise the pleasure Brédal's departure gave him, and repeated several times that Brédal need feel under no obligation to him whatever. He advised him to enter speedily on his new duties, and when Brédal announced his intention of starting for Spain forthwith, he accompanied him to the door in a most friendly manner, and pressed his hand quite warmly.

Old Baron von Breitenburg was enormously interested in the news; he sympathised in the warmest manner with the lovers.

Brédal had to tell him everything, from their first meeting on the steamer; when he came to the Austrian treaty, the Baron cried—

"What! The Countess wrote that settlement which I pronounced a masterpiece of

Diplomatic genius? *C'est unique! She* ought to have received the cross then. I shall give her a good scolding for making such a fool of me." The old man deplored having to part with his favourite; he laughed long and loud over Porzio's prospective discomfiture, and added—

"That is a pleasure I have never tasted, although I have had some pleasant experiences, too. All is fair in love and war. But it must add an additional zest if one can make one's personal enemy tie the knot. I never succeeded in doing more than circumventing an uncle, who was the guardian, but a rival—and a Prince to boot! *Ah, c'est excellent!* You are born to outdistance us all, and would have risen much higher if you had stayed with me; but you haven't come to an end of your tether yet. You will take the Countess's name and title of course—Count Brédal-Olfers, or Olfers-Brédal."

Goldberg did not receive the news with so

much enthusiasm. It cut him to the heart that Brédal intended to leave Denmark, and the pain made him unjust and ungracious both to Brédal and the Countess.

So much genuine affection and friendship were, however, apparent through all his *brusquerie*, that Brédal could not be angry with him.

"I have told you hundreds of times that you were created to be happy," said Goldberg one day. "Do you still hold to your old paradox that the most intense happiness must stop short of realisation to be perfect? Now that you have got your Consulship, and are going to marry the Countess, do you intend to carry out your theory, and put a bullet through your head?"

Brédal smiled and shook his head.

"Then don't talk such idiocy another time," laughed Goldberg.

Mrs. Bunkeflod wept bitterly when she heard that Brédal's departure was inevitable;

her grief was, however, somewhat comically blended with a fear of not being again able to secure so desirable a lodger, and considerably assuaged by the fact of Brédal's presenting her with the whole of his furniture.

CHAPTER XXII.

In the middle of October, when the wind had already begun its winter song, and the withered leaves began to fall, the little bark *Sancta Maria* lay waiting for sailing orders in the Rhede of Copenhagen. A foreign Consul had chartered her for a Spanish Countess, who was going to Seville, the Captain said.

It was uncertain whether the Consul would sail with her, that would depend upon his business. The lady was a very grand lady, to whom a Consul, one way or the other, was neither here nor there. He hoped to weigh anchor that very afternoon, for the wind was favourable.

The sun shone brightly as Brédal arrived at the landing place. He looked very pale

and worn; his parting with Baron von Breitenburg had been a hard wrench.

The *Sancta Maria* was flying the Spanish colours in honour of the Countess. An hour later two well-appointed carriages drove up to the Custom House. A crowd collected to see the foreign ladies and Ambassadors. Several gentlemen arrived on foot, and there was soon quite a large company assembled to bid farewell to the Countess Olfers. The unexpected departure of the Countess and her brother—the one for Spain, the other for St. Petersburg—had furnished unlimited material for gossip and speculation.

"How mysterious Count Olfers always is," said Lady Malden. "I only spoke to him two days ago, and he never mentioned a word about it."

"I assure you, dear Lady Malden, he has intended to leave for the last three months, only he would not say so," said the Marechâle, who always liked to seem behind the

curtain, and to know more than anyone else.

"I did not know it," said her daughter with tears in her eyes, "or I should have been most unhappy. What a wretched winter it will be without the Countess!"

Baron von Breitenburg arrived at this moment; he looked very sad, and much broken, and, unlike himself, spoke to no one.

Mdlle. d'Aubigny turned to him and said—

"You are also grieving at the Countess's departure."

"Indeed, I am," answered the Baron. "Her going robs me of one of my dearest friends, I lose more than most people would believe."

"Poor inconsolable adorer!" said Lady Malden, "I wonder what Prince Porzio will say when he comes back, and finds the bird flown. He has been away on some hunting expedition for more than a week."

The Countess now drove up with her

brother; she seemed much excited, and said something kind to everyone. She gave the Baron a letter to deliver to Prince Porzio; he whispered a few words in her ear, which she answered by a rosy blush. Then she turned to Mdlle. d'Aubigny. The poor girl was almost blinded by her tears. The Countess kissed her several times and whispered—

"My dear little friend, do not forget me. I will write to you when I reach my home."

The Marechâle cried—

"*Ah, que je suis desolèe, ma chère Comtesse!* Be sure you do not forget to send me a real Mantilla at the first opportunity."

Count Olfers now assisted his sister into the boat, and accompanied by her maid and one other servant, the Countess went on board the *Sancta Maria*. All the handkerchiefs waved, and the Countess answered with hers.

The diplomats then separated, and went

their several ways. Baron von Breitenburg took Hansen's arm, and walked with him along the quay.

At this moment the vessel unfurled her white wings like a bird preparing for flight. The Spanish flag floated at the mast, and waved a last farewell.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE "Foreign Consul" received the Countess on board. The cabin was reserved for her, with a second for her servants. The Consul shared the state room with the Captain.

When the Countess entered the cabin, Brédal closed the door and clasped her to his heart. For the first time they seemed to belong entirely to each other. Now, nothing could prevent their union. They went on deck to see the last of the town and coast.

Brédal looked somewhat sadly at Copenhagen, which was rapidly disappearing from view. The Countess moved closer to him.

"Are you sorry that you are following me, Hubert?" she whispered.

"No, my dearest, where you are is my home."

"We are not leaving Denmark for ever,

Hubert. We will return to this dear land, your fatherland, and my second home." The white villas gleamed in the sunshine. "Look, Hubert, there is our dear old house. Can you see the jasmine tree and the window? There is the terrace where we had tea after the storm. The garden door is open. Now everything disappears but the bench. I am so sorry I did not take it with me."

"Look, Sara, it seems to stretch its arms out to us. Why did we not bring the bench and the jasmine tree? We should have taken Denmark into Spain."

"My darling, how can I replace the land I have robbed you of?"

"Your heart is my fatherland, Sara. You will never take that away from me."

The autumn was unusually mild, and the journey very pleasant. Twenty-one days after they left Copenhagen, they could see the north Spanish coast. The wind had been favourable the whole time. Sara and Hubert

had spent their whole days on deck, where they could speak absolutely *sans gêne*, for the Captain and sailors were Spanish, and the servants German. Neither understood French, still less Danish, which the Countess began to speak tolerably fluently. She had extracted a promise from Brédal that he would never enter the saloon unless she gave him special permission. This very restriction lent an additional charm to their life.

On one particular evening, however, Brédal found it more difficult than usual to leave her, and began counting the days which must elapse before their arrival in Cadiz.

"Shall we soon be there?" he asked the Captain.

"In two days, if God will, and the wind doesn't change, we shall pass the Portuguese coast and St. Vincent. The rest is only a trifle. Everything by the help of the saints, but the *Sancta Maria* has always been blessed by the Holy Mother."

"In two days! Sara—do you hear? My God! I feel as if I could go mad for joy. My own Sara, my love—soon my adored wife."

He bent over her hand and pressed it passionately to his lips.

"And in four days, Hubert, in four days!"

"In four days in the first Spanish church—in four days you will be mine—my very own! Oh, Sara, can it be possible to be happier than we are now? Is not this life alone with you the acme of all happiness? And yet—I count each minute of those four days. Four days, and four long nights, when I can neither see nor speak to you! They are four eternities to me. Oh, Sara, you don't know how long and dark the nights are!"

"No, Hubert? And who told you that I sleep the whole night long?"

"Look, Sara, see how the waves press heart to heart—look how they kiss each other!"

And as the Countess unguardedly turned her head, he quickly pressed his lips to hers.

"Oh, Hubert, and the Captain is looking at us!"

"Sail ahoy!" sang out a sailor.

After looking through his glass, the Captain pronounced the stranger to be a Government vessel.

"We shall overhaul her in two hours. I fancy she is a Russian."

Everyone wanted to see the big vessel; it was a line of battle ship with three rows of cannon.

"I have such an odd feeling about meeting this ship," said Brédal, "I feel as if it must be my enemy."

"How curious!" said the Countess. "It seems to me, on the contrary, like a dear friend. It makes me quite happy to realize once more that there are other human beings besides ourselves on this desert of water."

The man-o'-war fired a shot. The white

smoke curled up in the air, and the sound echoed around.

"That is a question," said the Captain, and ran up his colours.

Soon after the Spanish flag also floated from the line of battle ship.

The Captain and the sailors received the national colours with a loud "Hurrah!"

"God be praised, it is not an Englishman," said the Captain. "Those gentlemen are so inquisitive and want to visit the whole world on the water."

The two vessels continued their course for about half an hour when another shot was fired by the man-o'-war. The ball whistled past the brig, and splashed the water high in the air.

"Look! look! Just like the pebbles I and Mdlle. d'Aubigny threw on the water in Denmark. Don't you remember?" cried the Countess.

The *Sancta Maria*, backing her topsails,

remained almost stationary as the enormous vessel loomed larger and larger, until at last the brig looked alongside her like a little hut near a big castle.

The masts of the man-o'-war rose high in the air, and a sailor said that one of the sails would serve to make a handkerchief to wrap the *Sancta Maria* in.

The man-o'-war then hailed through a speaking trumpet. A boat was lowered and the Captain went on board with his papers and list of passengers. He returned in a quarter of an hour. All was in order.

Both vessels then resumed their course, the three-decker altering hers, and a few hours' later there was nothing to be seen of her but a black speck on the horizon.

Brédal did not recover his usual cheerfulness until after she had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was a delicious afternoon. The air was so mild that the travellers imagined they could already feel some southerly warmth.

The sailors lounged about the forecastle, singing their Spanish songs. The Captain had ordered a double ration of wine in honour of the royal vessel.

The clouds were tinged with deep amber gold; the reflection of the sinking sun giving them a most peculiar colouring, which Brédal had never before seen, and which the Countess hailed as the first harbingers of Spain. Each cloud seemed to her like a dove with an olive branch in its mouth, and she greeted them with a cry of joy.

Throwing her arms round Hubert's neck, she said—

"Now I have you and Spain my happiness is complete!"

She sang a verse from a little Spanish romance about the love of a Spanish woman for her country; and marked the time, for want of castanets, in Hubert's hand.

Their approach to Spain seemed to give her new youth and life. Hubert could not take his eyes from her; he wound his arm round her slender waist and looked into her lovely eyes until she shut them. When her dark lashes shadowed them like a veil he pressed them closer with his burning lips.

Sara looked up at him at last and whispered—

"Two days! Is it not glorious that the days are so short?"

Hubert drew her closer to him.

"Oh, Hubert, how you are ruining my dress! I look as I did on that evening when you were attacked with such a violent respect for silk. Emilie could do nothing

with it for a long time. Let me go, M. le Consul; look at the Captain!"

"The Captain is looking at the clouds, Sara; he has something better to do than to look at us. Bend down that I may kiss your lovely neck."

"No, no! my neck does not want to be kissed, thank you. Do you think you have permission to kiss me because we are sitting behind a sail? Now be good and I will teach you a little Spanish song. I have sung it for years, but have never understood it till now."

She sang it to him, ending with the refrain—

I would not exchange with the Queen!

Soon after sunset it began to grow dark and cloudy. The wind rose, and a cold, damp mist came out of the sea.

The Captain advised Sara to go below, as

this mist was considered very injurious, but she preferred remaining on deck.

The wind rose higher and higher until it howled through the rigging. The Countess was nervous at first, but the Captain reassured her, saying there was not the slightest danger.

Brédal accompanied her to the door of the saloon.

"May I stay a few moments with you, Sara? The evening is so long, I shall die of impatience if I have to kill time with the Captain. Be merciful, darling!"

"Do you miss those clear Danish nights already that you used to abuse? This quick change is not half so pleasant. Sit down there. The lamp can stand here. Now, read me something."

"What can I read, Sara? Let us talk instead."

An hour later the book still lay unopened

on the table. Brédal sat beside the Countess, and they spoke of the happy future which lay before them.

By degrees all became still on board. The Captain spoke to the man at the wheel, and was of opinion that if the wind continued the same they would see Cape St. Vincent the next day.

"With the help of the Holy Mother," said the steersman.

"Did you hear, Sara? We shall see Cape St. Vincent to-morrow. The next will be Trafalgar, then comes San Lucar, and at last Cadiz. I know my map by heart, and could steer myself if it were necessary."

"Listen to the everlasting murmur of the waves, Hubert; it is like a lullaby to rock us to sleep. Is it not a wonderful thought that only one thin plank lies between us and death, and yet we are so secure. The brave wind works for us, and will bring us into safe harbour."

"And to the fulfilment of all our dearest wishes, Sara. At last I shall not be driven from you like a fugitive—you are often very unmerciful to me, Sara."

"Hush!" said the Countess, and laid her hand on his mouth. "I am only too indulgent. Why should I, who am the weakest, always have to be the strongest of us two, and say what we ought to do?"

"My darling, you are right, and I honour your strength. I do not complain. Forgive me if I have offended you."

He took her hand; the Countess was silent. Hubert gently placed his arm round her.

The sea roared, and the wind whistled through the rigging, but they did not hear it. The lamp burned low, and lighted the little cabin but dimly.

The Countess leant her head on Hubert's shoulder, his face rested on hers. Their broken whispers were almost inaudible.

Time passed quickly; it was already night. The Countess raised her head and said—

"Go, Hubert, leave me. We shall see each other to-morrow."

"Do not drive me away, Sara. It is such unspeakable happiness to hold you in my arms. My love, do not drive me from you!"

"Let us go on deck, Hubert, the air is so oppressive down here. Let us go up; I cannot live without the stars."

"Your eyes, Sara, are my stars. It is so dark to-night on deck, and the mist is so damp and cold. Let us stay here, my dearest."

"Leave me, Hubert; I feel so weak and ill. My blood surges so feverishly, and yet —I am so unspeakably happy. Go—stay—no, go, my own love, my idolized Hubert."

"Sara, my love—soon my wife! Oh, all happiness is summed up in that little word. Let me call you my wife. My God, Sara—

in two days you will be mine—entirely mine!"

Hubert pressed his lips on hers, and embraced her passionately.

Sara tried to speak, but her lips were closed by his kisses. She tried to push him from her, but her arms sank powerless. He drew her closer and closer to him until she was almost suffocated. Her eyes were closed, she did not know that the lamp was extinguished, and that they were in total darkness.

Hubert enclosed her still tighter in his embrace. He pressed his mouth on hers and whispered—

"Sara—my wife—"

The words were still on his lips when, with a deafening roar, a foaming wave surged into the cabin and seized the lovers in its giant arms.

The brig spun round and round with a terrible whirl, and sank. The *Sancta Maria*,

with her whole cargo, lay at the bottom of the sea.

* * * * *

The following day an entry appeared in the log-book of the royal vessel, the *Relentless*, to the effect that in the fog and storms of the previous night they had run into a vessel, probably the *Sancta Maria*, which they had spoken the day before. All hands lost.

THE END.